

The face of South Africa

By Maré Mouton

Klipplaat (meaning a stretch of stony ground) lies more or less in the middle of nowhere, with no tarred road passing through it. To the west lies Willowmore, to the north Aberdeen, to the east Jansenville. Southwards it is a long drive before one reaches Uitenhage. The hamlet attained some renown, however, for its place in the railway system. The first rail reached Klipplaat in 1879, when the Midlands Railroad from Port Elizabeth was extended from Uitenhage to Graaff-Reinet in a push to reach the diamond fields at Kimberley (the mountains around Graaff-Reinet put a halt to this plan). At the end of the Anglo-Boer War the Klein Karoo, wealthy from its ostrich feathers, again petitioned the Cape government for a railway link. As the line from Worcester had been extended to Swellendam rather than to Montagu, it was clear that the line from Cape Town was not going to reach Oudtshoorn. With support from the Eastern Cape, a line was instead approved from Klipplaat to Oudtshoorn, linking the Klein Karoo to the harbour at Port Elizabeth in 1904. (The line from George to Oudtshoorn through the Outeniqua Mountains would only be completed in 1913.) Klipplaat thus became an important rail junction and a sizeable community became established. Today, with fewer trains running, Klipplaat has acquired a patina of neglect. This once-pretty church is flanked on the one side by another church and on the other by a rusted steam locomotive displayed on a shunting line.

