

Parting shot By Maré Mouton



The enemy is upon us. Just after noon on Saturday, 17 May this cannon was fired at Hessequaskloof between Stormsvlei and Swellendam, in the vicinity of the original Dutch signal cannon of the eighteenth century. The ceremony was the opening shot, as it were, of plans by Erick Kellerman, the new owner of the property, to restore the historic settlement of the Uys family in Hessequaskloof and to introduce ox-wagon rides along the old wagon route from Stormsvlei to the location. The farm was declared a private nature conservation area on the same day that the cannon was fired. The system of cannons was used to summon the militia of burghers and officials to Table Bay in the event of a clear threat to the settlement, and was used effectively in 1795 when the English landed at Simon's Town, and again in 1806 with the landing at Blaauwberg. Research by Gerry de Vries and Jonathan Hall has reconstructed the entire Call-up System, which reached as far as Citrusdal in the north, Worcester in the east, and Zuurbraak beyond Swellendam to the south east. The cannons were placed within hearing distance of the next farmhouse or Company outpost, from where the designated person had to ride on horseback to the next cannon to fire it. It took about eight hours for the message to reach Swellendam from Table Bay, whereas a messenger on horseback would have taken several days. Erick managed to buy the eight-pounder VOC cannon from a liquidated estate at Stellenbosch, and was trained and assisted by the Cannon Association of SA (noongun@mweb.co.za).