

The face of South Africa

Photograph by Liesel Kershoff

Arniston/Waenhuiskrans, the coastal village south of Bredasdorp in the Cape Overberg, is reputedly the only town in South Africa with two official names. The location was first named Waenhuiskrans by early farmers and fishermen, after a seaside cave that is said to be big enough for a wagon and its span of oxen to turn in.

The name Arniston is derived from the British troopship HMS Arniston, that was wrecked off the coast on 30 May 1815. Only six of the 378 passengers (mainly wounded soldiers as well as women and children) survived. At an unknown later date, the farm near the scene of the shipwreck was named "Arniston Downs" by the surveyor, and by 1916 the name Arniston appeared on deeds of transfer for the area.

In the 1930s the name Waenhuiskrans was approved for the post office, but in 1981 a ballot was held to again decide on the name: Waenhuiskrans received 110 votes against 72 for Arniston, and the official name of the Local Area was changed accordingly.

However, the National Place Names Committee recognised that this was a sensitive matter, and on 8 May 1994 the then Minister of National Education, Mr Peter Marais, approved both the names Waenhuiskrans and Arniston as official place names. The local fishing village, which dates from before 1850, is still called Kassiesbaai.

The Waenhuiskrans cave is only accessible at low tide, and visitors should take care not to be trapped inside the cave by the incoming tide. Liesel Kershoff took this photograph at dawn from inside a smaller cave adjoining the large one.

