

“Dit Was Sport en Eer en Alles”

**A History of the Construction of
the Pells Hut on Waaihoek**

**by
Philip Pells**

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A History of the Construction of the Pells Hut on Waaihoek

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FRONTPIECE

Dit is nie nodig om langs swaar en gevaarlike paaie ons berge te beklim om hul bekoorlikheid te ondervind, hul majesteit te gewaar en hul skoonheid te geniet nie. Klim maar langs die gewone maklike en veilige voetpaaie op; snuif die geur van boegoe en aalwyn; bewonder die grootse prag van berge wat wegstrek tot aan die horison; geniet die geselskap van maats wat ook die reinigende invloed van die berge kan voel - en wanneer jy die aand nog 'n waboom- of sederstomp op die gloeiende kole gooi, en die vonke hoog in die donker opspat, sal jy kan sê; "Vandag het ek werklik gelewe"

Eddie Pells



INTRODUCTION

I wrote the first draft of this article in 1994 having been living in Sydney for some 20 years. I wrote it because the mountains of the Western Cape are imprinted in my psyche. When I returned to South Africa in 1991 and 1993 I had again climbed Waaihoek and again stayed in the hut named after my father. I again smelled the Boland fynbos and the smoky fug inside the hut. I felt the agony of slogging up the Grassy Triangle and the crispness of the morning air, the wonderful views from the peaks and the feeling of contentment that comes with a warm cup of coffee in the hut while the wind howls outside. I relived my first trip up at the age of eight when the snow was incredible, my first trip down Wit Els at fourteen and an amazing night ascent in moonlit snow with my brother Neville, at the age of twenty-one.

I wasn't there when Neville scattered Dad's ashes in the ridge overlooking the hut back in 1958. But when I stood next to the memorial plaque with my son in late 1993 I decided that I would write the story – so here it is.

The first draft languished for almost a decade, until I heard of the 65-year celebrations of the Pells hut. I now have the advantage of the memories of Heinz Einhorn, which he sent me in 1994 in response to a copy of the first draft. Also Neville has come good with the untold story of the property purchase in 1961.

BACKGROUND

The story of the Pells hut at Waaihoek really starts in September 1928 when Eddie Pells returned to the Cape from his period at Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar. At the end of his stay in Europe he went to Switzerland and stayed in a lodge at Murren where he learned to ski under the tutelage of a Mr Arnold Lunn. His companion there was Mr K deJ Hofmeyr, another Rhodes scholar who was to become a barrister in Cape Town.

Eddie Pells knew the Hex River mountains very well, having grown up in Worcester and explored the mountains extensively. He had already published the book *A Mountaineer's Paradise* together with Stanley Field. He brought his skis back from Switzerland and he and Hofmeyr initially set about investigating the viability of skiing in the Fonteintjiesberg area. There was another pair of skis in the Mountain Club of South Africa brought back earlier by a Mr E McL Thomas. Apparently Thomas had in mind skiing in the Matroosberg area.

The first skiing trip up Fonteintjiesberg was made in early July 1929 (probably the 6-8th) by Pells, Hofmeyr and H van Gend. This was reported in the *Cape Times* and immediately invoked substantial enthusiasm with numerous articles both there and in the *Worcester Standard* over the following months. It was clear at the outset that a hut was required and the *Cape Times* of July 15, 1929 reports as follows:

Skiing and tobogganing may become a regular winter attraction in the Cape Province. Since the Cape Times published an account of the exploits of Mr E G Pells and Mr Kidije Hofmeyr, who went skiing in the Worcester Mountains last weekend, it has become apparent that there is a considerable amount of interest locally in the possibility of winter sports for South

Africans. The Mountain Club has decided to erect a hut at a suitable spot, near the snow regions among the mountains, and a Cape Town skiing enthusiast offered to contribute half the cost of a simple hut, providing that the remaining half is forthcoming from other sources. How much the hut would cost is difficult to estimate, but the donor is willing to give up to £200 if necessary.

Where the hut is to be erected has not yet been decided. Attention has been directed to the snow covered plateau of Fonteintjiesberg, which is about eight or nine miles from Worcester. Mr Pells, who is a native of Worcester, is enthusiastic about conditions there, and he and one or two others are anxious that, provided the co-operation of the Worcester Municipality can be secured, the hut should be built on the upper slopes just below the summit of Fonteintjiesberg.

Over the weekend of 3-4 August 1929 a trip up Fonteintjiesberg was made by two parties, one being Pells and Hofmeyr with Misses Gerneke and Fouche (who later became Mrs Pells) and the second including two Norwegian skiers (Michelsen and Meyer) and a Cape Town reporter. Snow conditions were mediocre but some good skiing was enjoyed with the two ladies reported to be the first women to ski in South Africa. However, weather conditions, particularly during the ascent, were poor and the second party almost got into severe difficulty. The need for a hut became even more apparent. An article in the *Cape Times* which is probably from 9-10 August 1929 states:

Dr Barnard [secretary of the Mountain Club] hesitated about making any statement about the possibilities of winter sports in South Africa. He was not a skiing enthusiast himself, he declared, and he could not therefore speak with authority on the suitability or unsuitability of conditions on Fonteintjiesberg, but he thought some people might form an exaggerated idea of the possibilities, only to be disappointed.

Referring to the proposed mountain hut, either at Fonteintjiesberg or at some other suitable place, he stated the Mountain Club had the matter definitely in hand, but time was required to carry it through.

Those interested in the formation of a skiing club should communicate with Mr E W McL Thomas, Northern Buildings, George's Street; Mr H Michelsen, Shell Company, Old Cape House, Exchange Place; or Mr E G Pells, Mowbray Hall, Rosebank.

The push for Fonteintjiesberg remained strong and in August 1929 Eddie Pells is quoted as follows:

"I have been on top of Fonteintjiesberg about 15 or 20 times during the last 12 years and I can speak with some authority on conditions there. There are at least two heavy falls of snow every winter, and for a week or a fortnight following them you will be able to get soft snow and winter skiing There can be no doubt whatever that when conditions are most favourable, it will be possible to get a ski-run of three miles, from the summit of Fonteintjiesberg down to Disa Dell."

For the weekend of 23 August 1929 Pells issued an open invitation to the public, via an article in the *Cape Times*, to join a special excursion to Fonteintjiesberg "to see South Africa's suggested winter playground". Seven parties made the trip, including two Norwegians (Michelsen and Meyer) who proceeded to ski jump "flying through the air some 50 feet, clearing a big heap of boulders". A particularly noteworthy event that weekend was when Mr McL Thomas, who had brought skis to South Africa in 1926 "in the hope that someone like Mr Pells would try to use them", had his first ski run in South Africa. During this weekend the Hut Committee of the MCSA "picked out a provisional site for the hut, about 200 yards above Disa Dell".

However, there would prove to be some hurdles to the hut being built. An article from the *Worcester Standard* of September 1929, which reports on the annual meeting of the Worcester Section of the MCSA, states:

A CLUB HUT

Mr Field reported on the correspondence he had received from Mr E G Pells, indicating the Cape Town section of the Club had voted against building a club hut on Fonteintjiesberg. If anything was to be done in this direction, he said, it would, therefore, fall on the Worcester section to carry it out. Several members and others interested had given promises of donations towards a hut, and he had no doubt that a sufficient amount could be raised to build a hut large enough to accommodate the skis, and provide secure housing in the event of bad storms being experienced by members on the mountain. Proposals had been made for building up the front of the cave, but he would prefer to leave that open, or perhaps partially build it up as a public shelter.

It appears that the Cape Town branch of the MCSA was more interested in the Matroosberg area and there also seem to have been problems with access to Fonteintjiesberg, as can be gleaned from a note in an undated cutting from the *Cape Argus* (probably 1935 or 1936), which states:

Cape skiers know all about Fonteintjiesberg (now a prohibited area owing to the need of preserving Worcester's water supply from pollution) and Matroosberg

I have the distinct impression that my father had some differences with the MCSA probably arising from the lack of support for a hut on Fonteintjiesberg. There is a gap in my mother's scrapbook from about 1930 to 1938 when newspaper cuttings describe the near completion of the hut on Waaihoek.

"Dit Was Sport en Eer en Alles"

The undated *Cape Argus* cutting referred to above gives good background as to the genesis of Waaihoek as a ski area. It states as follows:

Mr E G Pells, president of the University Mountain Club, in the search his club is making for new skiing fields, explored the Waaihoek range during the weekend.

Now Pells has more information to give to skiers. "I found two magnificent gullies running south in the Waaihoek mountains," he said to me on the telephone today. "On Saturday (a day with very little snow about) these gullies, which are protected from the sun, were full of snow and gave a mile clear run on skis. After a good fall of snow there would be two-mile runs in two or three directions. This is a better skiing ground than any Fonteintjesberg or Matroosberg had to offer, and as I said, the snow is magnificent".

The tone of Mr Pells voice helped to assure me that he had found something exceptionally good for Cape skiers.

The track to these snowfields runs east and north from the Breede River railway station and through Mr du Toit's farm.

Mr Pells pitched his tent at a camping spot after three hours climb, and from there to the summit beacon, another three hours up, snow lay the whole way.

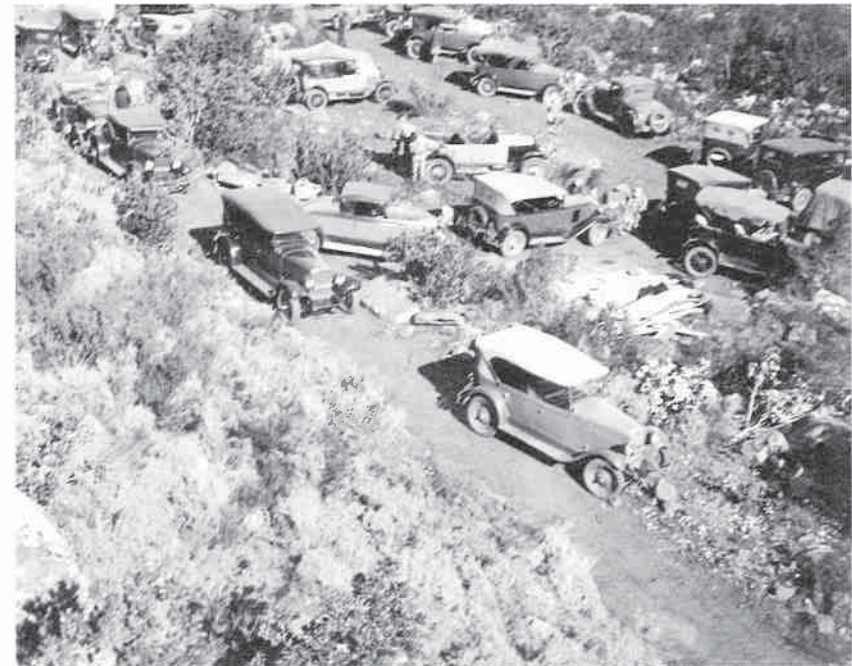
"The University Mountain Club", said Mr Pells, "will now consider building a hut on the Waaihoek range and the construction of a bridle path up to the hut."

CONSTRUCTION OF THE HUT

I am indebted to an article written by R W Watson in the *1938 Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa* for some accurate dates and details of the building of the hut.

Watson states that it was in August 1936 that Eddie Pells returned from a trip to Waaihoek "full of a fantastic new plan to erect a snow-hut there to enable the UCT Club to indulge in winter sports". It was the intention that students would build the hut with the University supplying the funds and the whole process would be completed by the winter of 1937.

Possibly work party cars at the base of Waaihoek - 1937 or 1938

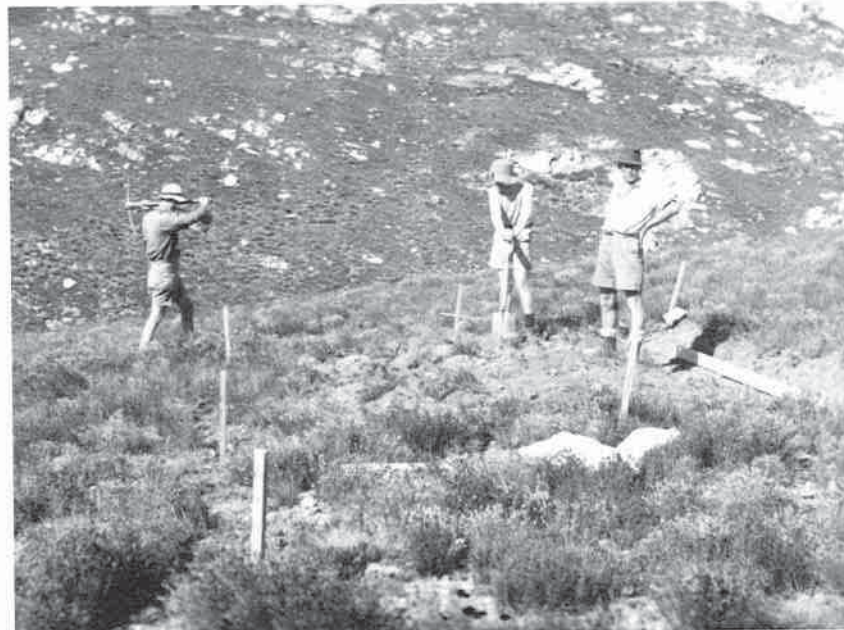


Mr C Roxborough ('Roxy'), a lecturer in architecture at UCT, designed the hut and took on the role of technical supervisor. At this point it is appropriate to quote directly from Watson's article because he gives a wonderful description of the construction process.



Left: Eddie Pells site clearing -
December 1936

Below: Staking out the hut and
turning the first sod -
December 1936



Thus the hut-building party had secured its foundation members in the Originator and Supervisor. But the students, who had promised so much, were slow in offering their services. And during the long vacation, student-members who had previously found the holiday so dull, hastily procured jobs, imaginary or otherwise, to escape the perils and hardships of a South African "labour camp". Thus during the long vacation of 1936-37 only three small parties visited the hut-building site, and they all came to sudden and frightful ends. The first was scared off the mountain, for Roxy had not yet been trained to sleep through the noises made by wild animals at night, and he succeeded in demoralising the whole party. The second party was blown off a peak by a tremendous gale, which threatened terrible disaster to the tents. And the third visit was brought to an abrupt end by imminent starvation. So by February 1937, the walls stood only one foot six inches high. But at this juncture it might not be out of place to mention some specific details of the hut-building. The hut measures 10 by 17 feet, and has sleeping accommodation for about fifteen members – at present, as the attic has yet to be put in. The walls are built of stone, found on or near the site – and what a job it is carrying the stones to the wall: building is easy by comparison! Each stone, of course, had to be shaped roughly. No cement has been used for the walls; enough clay was fortunately discovered while digging the hut foundations, and this mixed with sand and water has proved a useful binding material, which Eddie immediately dubbed "Daga". The roof is pitched and of corrugated iron. And this together with all the other material (mainly wood and tools) was carried up by "Ou Jan" and his gang, who are attached to Mr J G du Toit, the farmer, in Waboomsrivier Valley. Much of the success of this whole enterprise hinged on transport and, with

out the help of "Ou Jan", hut-building would certainly have been a difficult and arduous job, especially as donkey-transport up the "Easy Gullies" route is out of the question.

Most of the building was done during the mid-term vacation (April – May) of 1937 and 1938. At times students were really enthusiastic, but it was difficult to sustain their interest. The girls joined in too and for a time almost rivalled the efforts of the men. It was indeed an eye-opener to see the girls slogging up "Easy Gullies" with tremendous packs on their backs, scorning the recognised halts at "Agony Rock", "Hope Valley" and "Ferry Rest". But it was the staff who formed the backbone of these labour camps. Apart from Eddie and Roxy, who were always there, Professor Goodlet, Dr Einhorn, Dr Grindley, Mr Gilmore and even Dr Martin Versfeld proved untiring stone-gatherers, masons and builders. And so gradually throughout 1937 the hut-walls grew. Progress was discouragingly slow, but towards the end of the year hope began to replace the dull despair which everyone except Eddie appeared to feel, as the wall rose from the meagre one foot six to over six feet.

It is perhaps only right to mention that the sudden rapidity of progress was made when Roxy was forcibly detained at home. The hitherto pent-up forces in Eddie were now released. He immediately organised a "mud-slinging squad" – the pressure on the "daga mixers" was terrific – and the wall, although not beautiful to look at, and although severely frowned upon by the hypercritical, rose visibly. Thus Roxy was faced with the now well-known fait accompli. The method was employed later in the laying of the wooden floor last April. Eddie collected a band of loyal supporters, made a surprise attack on Waaihoek, and within half-a-day the floor was laid. Whether right or wrong the result of this Nazi method is that the students were able to withstand the severest blizzard known to Waaihoek hut-builders with a roof above their heads and a dry floor to sleep on.



Above: Waaihoek basin pre construction of the hut

Below: Tents of probably the first work party - December 1936



Heinz Einhorn arrived in South Africa from Bavaria in 1934, and was appointed as Junior Lecturer in Electrical Engineering in 1937. He was involved in building the hut from the time of the early work parties in January 1937.

His 1994 memory of the process is as follows:

"After a previous party had levelled the site, I remember well the work party in May 1937, when we started to build, with local rocks fitted by their own weight, the walls – about 2 ft thick. Subsequently the gaps were filled with mud and much later a bit of cement on the outside. Among many others, some two dozen, I remember, 'Proke' Goodlet, John Gilmore, Michael Dawes, Del Jolly (now Keen).

The toughest part was getting building material up, rafters, corrugated iron, cement and windows. I remember a hot summer day when I carried a big rafter up to 'Hope Valley' (about two thirds up). Frank Mitchell was with me carrying a couple of smaller beams. When one of them slipped off his shoulder and rolled down a steep slope, we thereafter called the place Sisyphus Face.



Tented work party - April or May 1937

After a part of the material had been carried up by ourselves, the Club made a contract with tough Ou Jan, the head of the local farm labourers, for them to carry the rest up.

The main workers were Roxy, Martin (Versfeld), Eddie and myself. I guess I had at least six, probably eight, work trips. Numerous students and some members of the staff helped, but I have forgotten most of the names or who were the most worthy to be mentioned.

Initially we slept in tents. Once the roof was up, we slept in the hut, at first with tarpaulins in front of the big gaps where subsequently windows and doors were fitted. I remember a vicious stormy and cold night when I made the limerick:

*Said Martin in the hut:
You must admit that my fate is unjust.
If I leave the enclosure I'll die of exposure;
If I stay inside, I'll bust.*



Above: Work party - April or May 1937

Below: Work on the wall - probably May 1937



It took numerous parties to finish it off over several years. I did a watercolour of the finished hut in 1940, and secured it against lightning the same year by earthing the roof.

At the time of building, the land did not belong to us. Much later a generous graduate, a civil engineer who wishes to remain anonymous, bought the property and donated it to UCT.

Eddie was the first to ski, long before the hut was built. After it was there, perhaps I was in a way, not sure, but when I first skied at Waaihoek I was the only experienced skier among beginners. I usually carried my own skis up, it was tough. In the fifties I thought I was getting too old for Waaihoek and joined the ski club at Matroosberg, where the climb to the hut is less than half the slog to the Pells hut. Last time I was at Waaihoek was when Sir Richard Luyt inaugurated the 'Hoare House', the second hut, a pre-fab erected in 1969-1971 under the initiative of an engineering student, Richard Hoare.

The *Cape Argus* of 10 February 1938 carried an article on the construction of the hut. It included a photograph of the structure with the roof timbers in position and a Union Jack flag flying from the gabled end. The article gives further details of what it terms the "Waaihoek Tigers", namely "Ou Jan" and his fellow labourers. It states:

During the month of January and the first week of February they did what experienced mountaineers had considered impossible.

They transported on their backs 40 sheets of six-foot corrugated iron, 100lb of lead sheeting, and 500lb of timber, first across four miles of rough country, and then up a steep and often precipitous 5000 foot climb.

Foremost among the "Tigers", carrying always the heaviest load, and always reaching the top first, was "Ou Jan", grandfather of several of the other porters.

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Loads of timber of similar weight per individual to those carried by the coloured porters had been transported to the top by Varsity students and staff during a camp held at the beginning of the long vacation.

Members have just returned from a second five-day camp at 5000 feet, during which the roof-timbers were put together and built into position, the walls completed, and the gable ends almost finished.

It is worth noting at this point that the title of this booklet is a quote from Ou Jan, which is recorded in my father's handwriting on the photograph below; it reads:

"Dit was Sport en Eer en Alles". In these words Ou Jan describes his epic carry of 3 tons 5,500 ft on Waaihoek.



*"Dit was Sport en Eer en Alles"
- the main reason why the hut was built at 5000 ft on Waaihoek*

Construction of the Hut

It seems reasonable to conclude that the hut was largely finished by the winter of 1938. That was a poor year for winter snow. However, a year later there is a newspaper cutting in the family scrapbook which states:

Six feet of snow is lying all round the University of Cape Town hut at 5500 feet on Waaihoek Peak. Snow stretches for miles in every direction. The hut, which holds fifteen, is crowded all the time. Members of the club set out in relays, as the students are now on vacation and so able to take full advantage of the magnificent conditions.

Opposite page: Ou Jan - "Dit was Sport en Eer en Alles"

Below: Eddie Pells placing rocks using mud mortar - April or May 1937



"Dit Was Sport en Eer en Alles"



Above: Ou Jan with three of his sons - *Photo: Eddie Pells*

Below: Eddie Pells and Ou Jan with two sheets of zinc strapped to his back at the hut site



Construction of the Hut

Eddie Pells

August 1937

Photo: R. W. Watson



Erecting the
roof frame
February 1938



From left to right:
Messrs Roxborough,
Pells, Quenod,
Pollock and Barwise





Above: Roof frame completed
- February 1938

Left: From top to bottom:
Messrs: Barwise, Pells, Pollock,
Quenod and Roxborough in
the background



SOME FAMILY RECOLLECTIONS

Eddie Pells' eldest son, Neville, was born in 1932. Neville was secretary of the UCT Mountain and Ski Club in 1952 and was responsible for constructing a pedestrian suspension bridge across Wabooms Creek to make access to the old base hut a simpler exercise. I assume the bridge is still there. He first climbed Waaihoek as a first year student in 1950. In his words "this was my first chance to see the hut which my father and his friends built in the early 1930's and which explained his many absences from home during the University holidays while I was a child".

Neville went on to play a key role in acquiring the Zuurberg property for UCT. This is the story alluded to by Heinz Einhorn, a story which until now has been untold. In Neville's words:

My curiosity and fascination with Waaihoek lead me to query the history and ownership of the 2000 hectares of the farm Zuurberg on which the hut was built.

In 1950 the property still belonged to the Scharmberg family whose father Captain Scharmberg had bought it about 30 years earlier. None of the family had ever set foot on the property and had only a vague idea of where it was.

The UCT Mountain and Ski Club's right to build a hut on the property was granted by a letter, still in the Jagger Library archives. This single page document is in my father's writing, signed by Captain Scharmberg, only giving the right to build the hut with no mention of right of access to the property over adjoining farms.

It was not until I returned to UCT as a part time BCom student in 1955 that I became seriously concerned about the ownership of the hut and the right to access. The long process of tracing the ownership and extent of the property then started. Captain Scharmberg had died and the property was owned jointly by his seven children who were spread over the length and breadth of South Africa. This made the right to the hut even more tenuous since any of them could have repudiated their father's permission and sold the ground plus the hut to someone else. At this time too the right to access over the adjoining farms was being questioned by the neighbouring farmers. I realised that it was highly desirable to obtain ownership of Zuurberg, and started the drawn out process of persuading the seven brothers and sisters to sell. My delight when I achieved what at one stage I thought was an impossible task was tempered by the necessity of finding the £2000¹ which was the price of the property. To explain the solution to this dilemma I must go back a bit in history.

I had completed my civil engineering degree in 1953 and on joining the company Ninham Shand, was promptly sent out to Worcester as assistant to Shand's nephew, Walter Powrie, who was the Resident Engineer on the Stettynskloof Dam. Both Walter and wife Ez were ardent climbers and had both been committee members of the UCT club some 10 years earlier. I lived with the family for 9 months, on the site in the mountains, some 30 miles from Worcester.

It was Ezme Powrie, in appreciation of the many wonderful days spent in the mountains while a medical student at UCT, who offered to donate the purchase price for Zuurberg. A magnificent gesture.

My problems were not quite yet over because it was not yet decided in whose name the property should be registered. It

¹ This is roughly just under 1 million rand in 2003 money.



Above: The completed roof - no annex - 1938 - Photo: Eddie Pells

Below: Roof on, but sidewalls incomplete - probably April or May 1938



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could not be the UCT Club as they were not a corporate entity so I had the somewhat unenviable task of deciding between the Mountain Club of South Africa and the University of Cape Town itself. After some soul searching and because of the long association of my father with UCT and the Club, I approached UCT and asked them whether they would consent to becoming the new owners of the land. They graciously agreed. My decision was vindicated some years later when the adjoining farmers once again challenged the right of access to the property, and ownership together with the many years of use defeated their challenge.

I should add one postscript from a note Neville sent me in 2003:

I have spoken to the grand daughter of Captain Scharmberg who tells me that all the seven children have died. If I had not bought the land the mind boggles to think who would now own it.

Another view of the chalet showing the ski slopes around it



Some Family Recollections

Eddie's second son, Julien, seven years younger than Neville, remembers his first slog up the mountain at about the age of twelve. From his teenage years to his early 40's Julien took little interest in the mountains. But it was in his genes, and sometime in his 40's he reverted to type. He climbed mountain after mountain and even resorted to walking around Rondebosch Common with a rucksack filled with 20kg of brown sugar to strengthen his climbing legs. Brown sugar came in plastic bags and was therefore preferable to white sugar in paper bags.

Thus while Neville and I suffer from too much good food and wine, and can only dream of exploits past, Julien climbs and climbs.

My first memory is a night trip along the mud gravel road to the old base hut at about the age of 5. This hut was on the southeastern side of Wabooms Creek, about 500m upstream of the turnoff to the New Base Hut. We went there quite a few times when I was little and watched the Meerkats sneaking around the fireplace after we had gone to bed. The stream near the old bottom hut was wonderfully clear and we spent hours and hours making dams and rapids.

Completed hut



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The road to the old base hut went past the cottages where Ou Jan and his family lived and on every trip to Waaihoek that I made with my father he would stop to take something to the family and probably yarn about the building of the hut.



Left: Probably winter of 1937

Below: The hut with sidewalls not completed - probably winter of 1937



Some Family Recollections

At the age of about 7 or 8 I graduated to climbing up Waaihoek as far as the Middle Hut but could go on no further. I remember a terrifying stormy night sleeping with Dad and Julien in that hut. That's when Dad told us the story of why the little Middle Hut lean-to was built; a sad story which is reproduced in the Appendix. On the way down, not far from where the lower, concrete shell, hut was subsequently built, we were accosted by a troop of very angry baboons. And then a few hundred metres further came across a leopard. It was all a bit scary for an 8-year old.

At ten, I made my first climb to the top in the snow, but it was a trip up Waaihoek and down the Witels gorges in 1959 that, like for so many other people, tied me to the place forever. Jan Hofmeyer was our leader and he missed the route from the hut down into Witels, so he invented his own down the awe inspiring Waaihoek slabs.

After the storm of Tuesday night - Photo: Eddie Pells



In 1964 I, and my subsequent-to-be-wife Helen, were part of the first work party, under Ed Malanaric, to build the new, Dr King designed, concrete shell lower hut. Dr King was lecturer in concrete technology at UCT. The concept of his structure was to spread hessian tightly between arches made from steel pipe, and then to spread mortar over the hessian, to create a concrete version of what looks like the canvas cover of a Voortrekker wagon.

Well we set up the steel arches, strung the hessian and set about trying to build up a mortar layer onto the floppy, near vertical hessian sides. About 20 of us worked in small groups throughout a hot Saturday, trying to build up 50mm thick layers of moist mortar. Some got as high as a metre above the ground before it sheared off; swear, curse, start again. At about 3 o'clock in the afternoon came my one and only contribution to the Waaihoek saga. I was so angry with King and his stupid design that I picked up a handful of over-wet reject mortar and threw it against the hessian. It stuck. Within a few minutes the whole lot of us had wet up our mortar to the consistency of thick soup and were throwing it against the hessian. The first layer of the complete hyperbolic paraboloid shell was finished by nightfall.

In 1991, after a gap of 25 years, I persuaded Peter Broster to make the trip with me, under the typical elderly male misconception that we are forever 22 years old. It turned dark before we reached the top of the Grassy Triangle; no torches. By this time, Peter had stopped speaking to me. We eventually reached the crest overlooking the broad, blacked-out basin, which somewhere contained the hut, and I really had only a vague memory as to where it was – an uncertainty I chose not to convey to Peter. About three quarters of an hour later we staggered into the hut, and found an old billy and enough water from the nearby stream to rehydrate ourselves with condensed milk tea. The next morning was crystal clear and still. We climbed to the summit and the two of us absorbed the vistas and the smells, which if you have not been there, simply cannot be conveyed. On the way down we stood naked in the waterfall below the Middle Hut, surrounded by twenty or thirty scarlet disa orchids, while the fynbos-covered mountainsides around us shimmered in the heat. Probably two of the most wonderful days of my life.

Skiing a hundred yards from the summit of Waaihoek - probably 1943



Dad at Waaihoek - 1955 or 1956



1996 STORM DAMAGE AND RECONSTRUCTION

I have included this section because when I heard in 1996 that the hut had been severely damaged in a major storm I thought; "That's it, nobody will bother to rebuild it. It will just become a pile of stones and memories". How wrong I was and how grateful I am that the love for the place which lead to the original hut, still flows through the veins of those who visit the place. The magic seems to work on just about everyone. To quote from one of Peter Broster's Leaf College students after a first ever mountain hike (of any kind) to Waaihoek:

"This has been a breathtaking experience. Being at eagle heights above the Hex River Mountains. I experienced another meaning of life- free, free, free!"

Thunzi

This brief summary of the 1996/1997 events is taken from articles by James Cullis and Jeremy Wakeford in the 1996 and 1997 newsletters and magazines of the UCT Club. The story goes as follows:

A major storm hit the Western Cape on the long weekend of Saturday 15 to Monday 17 June 1996. The roof of the hut, which had only recently been repaired, flew off. All the corrugated iron sheets were ripped off the main roof and the rafters (including no doubt the one carried up by Heinz Einhorn!) were wrenched to the extent that the walls were cracked and some stones loosened. Excellent skiing conditions followed that winter and little was done about the hut until the fourth quarter of 1996. The hut was well insured but there was debate as to whether it was worth rebuilding it.



Above: The front of the hut after the storm

Below: The damaged hut after the storm





Above: The interior of the hut after the storm

Below: The reconstructed hut



Prominent past and present members of the Club were called together and it was decided to replace the roof as the walls were still strong enough to use. The legendary Mike Mamacos lent his help together with Duncan Woolley. A design was prepared and the necessary material acquired in the first quarter of 1997.

In words which echo those of the 1930's builders, James Cullis notes that "the only problem was how to get over a ton of material up the rugged Waaihoek". Some of the students had already carried up 10kg bags of cement to start fixing the walls and didn't fancy timber rafters and corrugated iron sheets. Fortunately an Air Force helicopter lift was arranged and the material was dropped at the hut site on 18 April 1997. Cullis completes the story as follows:

On 8 subsequent weekends over 50 club members did their bit and soon Pells was looking like a hut again. The spirit on the site was quite unbelievable. It is true that hardship bring out the best in people. Even when workers were slightly hung over from a serious high altitude Birthday Party, they were prepared to spend the whole day smiling and hammering away. The camaraderie was due to the nature of the people involved and the remoteness and beauty of our site. It could easily be compared to the Upper Cable Station site.

First the A-frame rafters were constructed and lifted into place. Next it was the turn of the 7m long purlins and the new window frame. Then came the silver insulation and the window and door side paneling. Finally the 3.5m long sheets of IBR sheeting were cut to size and put in place. The cutting of these sheets involved the use of a hacksaw that would have given the anti-noise pollution environmentalists, serious grey hairs. (Not to mention the sawers themselves.) In the evening of Monday 12 May, working by torchlight, Steve Hancock and I hammered the last roof nail home. A week later the first people stayed overnight in the hut and had a roof wetting party of sorts!

DENOUEMENT

Eddie Pells became Professor of Education at UCT. Of his fellow workers I know that Heinz Einhorn became Senior Lecturer in 1934 and in 1996, the year he turned 90, UCT appointed him Honorary Professor. He gave his course in Lighting and Illumination for 63 years and was preparing to travel to New York to present a paper when he died on 11 May 2000. To quote my friend and his colleague, Ian MacHutchon, "He got up in the morning, got down to do his morning exercises and did not get up again".

Martin Versfeld became Professor of Philosophy. He was my "Uncle Martin", smoked a pipe all the time, had terrible teeth, a wonderful laugh, a great mind and a kind heart.

Eddie died on 24 August 1958. His ashes were spread on the ridge overlooking the Waaihoek basin and the hut. Neville and his friends fixed a plaque to a large boulder next to the pathway at the point where you catch your first glimpse of the hut after the hard slog up the mountain. The plaque was still there when I last looked for it in 1993. It says:

"In memory of Eddie Pells and his enthusiasm"

The best way I can think of ending this article is to reproduce the only written record I can find by Eddie of the construction of the hut. It comes from an article in Afrikaans published in *Die Burger*, probably in about 1940. It reads as follows:

Die bou van die hutte is vir altyd in die geheue van diegene, wat so vermetel was om dit te onderneem, ingebrand. Dit was werk, hoor! Balke van honderd pond en sinkplate moes op die skouer meer as vierduisend voet hoog gedra word! Daar moes in die buitelug in Julie-maand met die termometer tien graad benede vriespunt geslaap word! Die winterstorms wat die tente uitmekaar skeur en ons van die berg afgedryf het! Die skroei in die somerson! Wie sal die dinge vergeet! Maar al die bloed, sweet en trane word gering gereken wanner ons in die hut slaap, terwyl die winterstorms om ons skreeu en huil.

Die volgende oggend as ons die deur oopmaak, staar ons op 'n sneeubedekte wereld. Dan kom die beloning vir al ons arbeid ..."

PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs with this text are an essay in themselves. They are mostly taken from old family albums. They are not professional quality and were probably taken with "Baby Brownie" or Box cameras. Very few of them are dated and I have had to assess their dates based on the historical narratives by Watson and Einhorn and from similar photographs published at the time in the *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus*. Fortunately some of the photographs are annotated by my father on their reverse side and these quotations add flavour to the photographic essay. I have chosen the photographs to tell the story of the early days of skiing (1929 to 1930), the construction of the hut, skiing around the hut in the early years, and finally the damage and reconstruction in 1996/1997.

For the photographs of the 1996 storm damage and the subsequent reconstruction, I thank Pierre Hoffa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is largely a synthesis of newspaper articles, Annual Reports and letters produced by others. It is not the whole story about Waaihoek, it is my personal story and that of my brothers.

I would like to thank all who provided material I have used and acknowledged in the text. Particularly, I would like to thank those who introduced me, at times cajoled me, and finally accompanied me in wonders of the Western Cape mountains; my dad, Stan Fish, Jan Hofmeyer, Helen Pells, Peter Broster and Nick Starke.

I am grateful for Pierre Hoffa's chronology of events at Zuurberg given in the *1997 UCT Mountain and Ski Club magazine*.

THE GENESIS OF THE MIDDLE HUT

On a Saturday, in August 1945??? a party of non UCT Club members, comprising Mr P Kahn, his wife Denys, Mr J O Bromback, Mr Norman Fraser, Mrs Queenie Bekker and 13 year old Roderick Thomson set out to climb Waaihoek. Somewhere above where the Middle Hut now is they were caught in an icy storm. The party split, with the Kahns, Bromback and the boy Thomson, turning round to retreat down the mountain. It is thought that they missed the critical point on the descent where one has to climb out of the main gully to the right, and they continued on straight down to the point where cliffs make the descent impossible. Mrs Kahn could go no further and, according to the newspaper report:

was last seen by the 13-year-old member of the party, Roderick Thomson, of Claremont – whom she sent down the mountain to try to get help – in the company of her husband, and Mr Bromback, both of whom were then overcome by cold and fatigue. Her body was found lying in a curled up position 400 yards from the two men.

In an amazing feat the 13-year-old Roderick Thomson made it on his own to the farm Vredehoek at the bottom of the mountain and raised the alarm. The rescue party found the bodies of the Kahns and Bromback, but the remaining two climbers were missing.

It transpired that they had battled their way up the mountain and had reached the Pells hut, soaked and frozen, late on the Saturday afternoon and had to break a window to enter. They undressed and wrapped themselves in blankets. They had plenty to eat, but nothing warm as they were not able to get the primus stoves going without methylated spirits.

"Dit Was Sport en Eer en Alles"

By the Monday their clothes had dried sufficiently for them to dress and prepare to descend to Vredehoek. They were on the point of leaving when two rescuers, Mr Oliver Kuys and Mr N Johnston, arrived at the hut. The rescuers managed to light the primus stove, gave Mrs Bekker and Fraser their first warm drink in two days, and then escorted them down the mountain..

The tiny Middle Hut, which is no more than a lean-to against a big boulder, was built after this tragedy.

When my dad first told Julien and I the story, one desolate night in that hut in 1953, he locked into my mind that one should try never to split a climbing party caught in a storm, and the best chance for survival is to huddle together, sharing body heat, in whatever shelter is available. Julien remembers another part of Dad's story that night, which at least provides an amusing ending to a sad story:

I remember Dad saying that their lives might have been saved if they carried a slab of dark chocolate and matches in a waterproof container. So I always carried both. I must say that the dark chocolate looked pretty tatty by the end of my climbing career – cause I don't like the stuff. Once fed some of the disintegrating pieces to my climbing companion dog – who gobbled up all she could get and was horribly ill on return home – getting me into severe trouble.

Every time we climbed Waaihoek with Dad he would stop at the point where the Kahn group missed the critical turn on their desperate descent, and work on the paint markers and the cairn which shows the exit.

The Middle Hut is still there, with its shabby loose stone walls, its beds of dried slangbos, and its rusted corrugated iron roof. And no doubt it has provided shelter for many who have encountered adverse weather, or exhaustion, over the past 50 years.

