

The Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site: A New Statement of Significance

*Cecilia Kruger and Marié van Heerden**

Introduction

All at once heritage is everywhere – in the news, in the movies, in the marketplace – in everything from galaxies to genes. It is the chief focus of patriotism and a prime lure for tourism. One can barely move without bumping into a heritage site. Every legacy is cherished. From ethnic roots to history theme parks, Hollywood to the Holocaust, the whole world is busy lauding – or lamenting – some past, be it fact or fiction.¹

Heritage no longer is the exclusive field of study of the palaeontologists, archaeologists, museum scientists and scientists of other related disciplines. The importance of heritage as historical consciousness as manifested in the behaviour of people, in monuments and practices of conservation, and its interplay with History as discipline,² has also recently been acknowledged by South African historians.³ In fact, no less than two articles in the previous issue of *Historia*, although different in essence, touched on these issues, proving the aforementioned statement.⁴

The importance of heritage in South Africa reverberates in the preamble to the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), No 25 of 1999. It states, in short, that its aims are to promote the healthy

* Cecilia Kruger was appointed as Manager, Professional Services of the Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site in 2000. She obtained her M.A. degree in Heritage Management in the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of Pretoria in 2003. Marié van Heerden is a lecturer in the same department and is the manager of the Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies courses.

1. D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Viking, London, 1996), p ix.
2. G. Verhoef, "Heritage Creation and Research", *Historia*, 47, 2, November 2002, p 395.
3. In June 2002, the South African Historical Association organised a milestone conference on the theme of "Heritage Creation and Research: the restructuring of Historical Studies in Southern Africa".
4. J.M. Gore, "New Histories in a Post-Colonial Society – Transformation in South African Museums since 1994", *Historia*, 50, 1, May 2005, pp 75-95; S. Marschall, "Making money with Memories: The Fusion of Heritage, Tourism and Identity Formation in South Africa", *Historia*, 50, 1, May 2005, pp 103-117.

management of national assets and enable communities to cherish and conserve their heritage for future generations. The South African heritage is unique and valuable, and cannot be renewed. It helps us to define our identity, forms the basis of our mental welfare and has the power to build a nation.

Our heritage has the potential to establish our diverse cultures and a national character. It commemorates our achievements and contributes to rectifying the injustices of the past. It educates us, deepens our understanding of society and encourages us to have empathy with the experiences of others. In addition it facilitates healing, as well as material and symbolical restoration. It also promotes new and previously neglected research about our rich oral history and traditions.⁵

Together with the increasing awareness of the importance of our heritage, a realisation of the importance of conserving this heritage in a scientific manner has developed, giving rise to a “new” field of study known as Heritage Management. The development of this discipline can be traced back to the development of Archaeological and eventually Cultural Resource Management in the United States of America in the early 1970s.

The question as to the significance or relevance of heritage, in particular monuments dating from a previous era, such as for example the era of apartheid in South Africa, and the necessity (or not) to conserve such a heritage in a democratic new South Africa, does arise. In order to reach some conclusion in this regard, the Voortrekker Monument, as well as its past and present significance will be discussed.

What is a “heritage site”?

According to the National Heritage Resources Act, the term “site” means any area of land, including land covered by water, together with any structures or objects thereon.⁶ “Heritage site” means a place declared to be a national heritage site by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), or a place declared to be a provincial heritage site by a provincial heritage resources authority.⁷

5. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 2.

6. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 12.

7. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 8.

The Act further describes “place” to be one, or a combination of the following:

- A site, area or region;
- A building or other structure which may include equipment, furniture, fittings, and articles associated with or connected with such a building or other structure;
- A group of buildings or other structures which may include equipment, furniture, fittings and articles associated with or connected with such a group of buildings or other structures;
- An open space, including a public square, street, or park;
- In relation to the management of a place, the immediate surroundings of a place are included.⁸

In relation to heritage resources, “management” includes the conservation, presentation and improvement of a place protected in terms of the South African National Heritage Resources Act.⁹ The conservation of a heritage site is the core business of a heritage manager and consists of various facets, the most important being the compilation of a conservation management plan. The point of departure for such a plan, is the determination of the cultural significance of the heritage site.

Determining the cultural significance of a heritage site

Experience has shown that determining the cultural significance of a site is by no means an easy task. In the final draft of the Australian Burra Charter¹⁰, it is stated that the term “cultural significance” means the aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present, or future generations. Cultural significance is synonymous with “heritage significance” and “cultural heritage value”. The cultural significance of a place may change as a result of the continuing history thereof and the understanding thereof may change as a result of newly found information.¹¹

The American cultural resource management expert, Don Fowler, also often refers to the importance of the value of cultural resources. He agrees that the “significance” (value) of these resources has to be determined. Although Fowler refers to four aspects of significance,

8. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 10.

9. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 10.

10. This Charter played a significant role in the drafting of Act 25 of 1999.

11. Australia ICOMOS, *The Burra Charter, Final draft*, 1999, p 2.

namely the historical, architectural, archaeological and cultural aspects, this is scientific categorisation and does not take subjectivity, especially present in a multi-cultural society such as South Africa, into consideration.¹²

The value of a resource is directly related to some end or use, and is not inherent in the resource itself. Thus value is dependent upon the particular cultural, intellectual, historical and psychological frames of reference held by particular individuals or groups.

Different cultural groups may also attach different nuances or values to the same cultural resource. The Bushmen (San), for example, created rock art, which had religious value for them. For the present-day Western society, the value of rock art is informational, educational and aesthetic, but not necessarily religious.¹³

Cultural significance of a heritage site and the South African National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999

The cultural significance of a heritage site is of particular importance in heritage management as it ultimately determines the grading of the site in South African terms. Act 25 of 1999 provides for SAHRA, in consultation with the Minister of Arts and Culture, and members of the executive councils of every province, to establish a system of grading of places and objects according to their cultural significance.¹⁴ This implies that all monuments and sites previously regarded as “national monuments”, would have to be re-graded, as many could no longer be regarded as being of national importance.

This grading system of the South African Heritage Resources Act provides for three levels of cultural significance of heritage resources, namely Grade I (a heritage resource with qualities so exceptional that they are of special national significance); Grade II (a heritage resource significant within the context of a province or a region); or Grade III (other heritage resources worthy of conservation).¹⁵ Until such time as this grading system is established, buildings and structures such as the

12. I. Coetzee, “Cultural Resources – A tour through our World in one Country”, in W. Loots (ed), *Cultural Resources and Regional Tourism* (South African Society for Cultural History, Pretoria, 1994), p 28.

13. I. Coetzee, “Cultural resources”, p 30.

14. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 18.

15. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 18.

Anglo-Boer War Fort Schanskop in Pretoria, declared as national monuments in accordance with the National Monuments Council Act of 1969, will continue to be regarded as provincial heritage sites.¹⁶

According to Section 38 of the National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, “cultural significance” means the aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic, or technological value or significance of a site.¹⁷ The following values should also be considered: South African historical significance; rarity; contribution to the understanding of the South African natural or cultural heritage; displaying characteristics of classes of South African places or objects; exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics; demonstrating high creative or technical achievements; a strong association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons; a strong association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in the history of South Africa; and significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa.¹⁸ According to the New Zealand authors, Hall and McArthur, a further, very important aspect that must be included when the significance of a site is determined, is the economic significance in terms of tourism, recreation, visitor spending, flow-on effects, sponsorships, et cetera.¹⁹

According to Naudé, it would be ideal if one could combine these categories of cultural significance with Herskovits’s model of eleven cultural universals. These are religious, political, judicial, social, educational, economical, knowledge and philosophy systems, as well as language, technology, the arts and a system of play.²⁰

Role of cultural identity in establishing cultural significance

One of the most important means by which the cultural significance of a heritage site is assessed, is by determining the role it played or is playing in establishing the cultural identity of a particular group.

16. Personal information: Ms C. Botha, Director: Museum Services, Gauteng Provincial Government, Private Bag X83, Marshalltown, 2107, 9 May 2002.
17. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 8.
18. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 14.
19. The National Research Foundation in South Africa obviously also regards tourism as an important aspect, as it is funding Marschall’s research on this topic.
20. M. Naudé, “Cultural Heritage and the Environmental Impact Assessment Process”, *Research by the National Cultural History Museum*, 9, 2000, pp 42, 47.

Heritage is one of the components of people's identity and perhaps all heritage is concerned with someone's identity. People are part of certain groups, they identify with certain regions and places, and although more complicated, most people also feel some sort of a national identity. These identities are not alternatives, but are all these things simultaneously. Individuals resolve these conflicts within themselves, but they are not easily resolved between groups.²¹

This is especially true in countries such as South Africa, where European and British colonialism not only resulted in the establishment of different cultural groups within one geographical region, but also created a discontinuity in the history of that region. As in many countries that have been colonised, the new democratic South Africa is counteracting colonisation by the use of monuments to demonstrate a continuous cultural identity within which the colonial period was no more than an irrelevant episode.²² In South Africa, where for all practical purposes, the indigenous inhabitants have experienced two colonial periods (one dominated by European immigrants since 1652 and another by the British since 1803), the National Heritage Resources Act stresses the importance of establishing a (new) cultural identity:

Our heritage is unique and precious and it cannot be renewed. It helps us to define our *cultural identity* and therefore lies at the heart of our spiritual well-being and has the power to *build our nation*. It has the potential to affirm our diverse cultures, and in so doing shape our *national character*. Our heritage celebrates our achievements and contributes to redressing past inequalities.²³

The fact that heritage indeed plays such an important role in the establishment of cultural identity is, more often than not, used by political parties for their own purposes. Ashworth is of the opinion that it is an established fact that there is a political role for heritage. All heritages are actual or potential political instruments, whether so intended or not.²⁴

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21. G. Ashworth and P. Howard, *European Heritage Planning and Management* (Intellect, Exeter, 1999), pp 8-9.
 22. H.F. Cleere, "Introduction: the Rationale of Archaeological Heritage Management", in H.F. Cleere (ed), *Archaeological Heritage Management in the Modern World* (Unwin Hyman, London, 1989), p 8.
 23. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 2; L.P.H.M. Mtshali, "Address", in DACST, *The Re-interpretation of the Battle of Blood River / Ncome*. Papers of a one-day seminar held on 31 October 1998 at the University of Zululand, published by Department of Arts and Culture, Pretoria, 1999, p 8.
 24. Ashworth & Howard, *European Heritage Planning and Management*, p 86.

The preamble to the South African Heritage Resources Act mentioned above, is a case in point.

The destruction of heritage or places of cultural importance (physically) by bombarding the buildings or demolishing monuments²⁵, or more subtly (mentally) by verbally attacking and criticising the monuments erected by other cultural groups, is an important way of displacing people and destroying their identity to break the link binding an ethnic group with a particular place.²⁶

Significance of the Voortrekker Monument (VTM) for Afrikaners

Historical overview

To understand the cultural significance of the Voortrekker Monument and the role that it played in establishing the cultural identity of the Afrikaner in particular in South Africa, as well as in South African politics, it is necessary to look briefly at why it was built, and at the socio-economic and political climate in which it was erected.

The Voortrekker Monument, situated south of Pretoria, is a perfect example of a monument that was constructed to mark an historic event, namely the Great Trek of 1835 to 1852. At the same time, the Monument commemorates the approximately 20 000 people who participated in this migration from the Cape Colony into the interior of Southern Africa. This was a successful rebellion against British rule, and is described by Van Jaarsveld as the first anti-colonial action in Africa.²⁷ These pioneers referred to themselves as “emigrants” and it was only from the 1870s that the word “Voortrekkers” came into use when referring to these pioneers.²⁸ Much has been written about this event and its importance in South African history, and it is not the purpose of this discourse to elaborate on its significance. Suffice it to say that, although the Voortrekkers perhaps did not realise the importance of their migration, it

25. E. Maré, “The Aesthetics of Ideology: the Vicissitudes of Monuments”, *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 16, 2, November 2002, pp 17, 18.

26. Ashworth & Howard, *European Heritage Planning and Management*, p 54.

27. F.A. van Jaarsveld, “Die Groot Trek in die Historiese Bewussyn van die Afrikaners”, in J.S. Bergh (red.), *Herdenkingsjaar 1988* (De Jager-HAUM, Pretoria, 1988), p 102.

28. J.T. du Bruyn, “Die Groot Trek”, in T. Cameron en S.B. Spies (reds.), *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika in Woord en Beeld* (Human & Rousseau, Kaapstad, 1986), p 127.

has been a great source of inspiration for speeches, historiography, literature and festivals, and has led to the erection of approximately thirty monuments countrywide – the largest and most important of these being the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria.²⁹

According to Botha, the term “monument” has two meanings. Firstly, it can refer to artefacts from the past that have a historical meaning,³⁰ such as the old Anglo-Boer War fort in Bloemfontein or the mine dumps around Johannesburg. Secondly, a monument can be a structure (such as the Voortrekker Monument), a sculpture, or a memorial, which was deliberately erected to commemorate a person or an event.³¹ It is usually displayed in public to remind viewers of those persons or events and thus serves as memory aid of a specific community or group.³²

Botha also states that it is natural and understandable that monuments and nationalism are related, as there is an undeniable, natural interaction between the two concepts. Ashworth calls this interaction between nationalism and national heritage an intimate relationship within which it is very difficult to disentangle cause from effect. The nation is an abstraction created by heritage, but nation-states need a national heritage in order to survive and thus create it as a matter of policy.³³ Again the preamble to the South African Heritage Resources Act could serve as a case in point.

Monuments commemorate the deeds and successes of people who are not only social beings, but also national beings – destined to be members of a nation. Nationalism is a love for, pride in, and loyalty to everything that belongs to the nation or people (*volk*), language, heroes, history and culture. A monument tries to preserve everything that is beautiful, heroic, honourable and memorable for posterity. Manifestations of nationalism call for monuments, and monuments, in turn, generate nationalism.³⁴ The Voortrekker Monument demonstrates this admirably.

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29. Du Bruyn, “Die Groot Trek”, p 127; Van Jaarsveld, “Die Groot Trek”, p 107.
 30. M.C. Botha, “Monumente en Nasionalisme”, *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Kultuurgeskiedenis*, 2, 2, July 1985, p 31.
 31. Botha, “Monumente en Nasionalisme”, p 31.
 32. Maré, “The Aesthetics of Ideology”, p 16.
 33. Ashworth and Howard, *European Heritage Planning and Management*, p 86.
 34. Botha, “Monumente en Nasionalisme”, p 32.

Monuments are also forms of protest against the succession of generations and the transience of mankind, and present symbols in an attempt to eternalise the past. This can be damaging to the past (and the present), as only heroes from a limited period are selected, while other aspects of history and ordinary human beings are neglected.³⁵ Once again the Voortrekker Monument serves as a perfect example.

Physical description of the site

The basis for determining the cultural significance of a monument or site is the identification and recording of that specific heritage site.³⁶ The Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site is an example of a cultural heritage site, the emphasis being on the description of the site rather than on its identification (as in the case of an archaeological site), owing to the fact that the architect had identified the site prior to designing the Monument.

The selection of a suitable area in 1936 on which to build the Voortrekker Monument, was a lengthy process. For a variety of reasons, Pretoria was chosen.³⁷ The selection of the exact site south of Pretoria was yet another lengthy process. The Pretoria City Council made several different sites available, which included, amongst others, Wonderboomkop, Schanskop and Klapperkop.

The architect of the Voortrekker Monument, Gerard Moerdijk (1890-1958) was very particular in his selection and chose a small *koppie* (hill) to the south of Pretoria, which was situated adjacent to the site of the Anglo-Boer War Fort Schanskop. This was in order to create the impression that the monument was the crown of the *koppie* and thus to appear larger and more imposing. The hill would also serve as a kind of pedestal for the Monument.³⁸ A larger hill would diminish the majesty of the building and this would dishonour the memory of the Voortrekkers.³⁹

35. Van Jaarsveld, "Die Groot Trek", pp 107-109.

36. H.F. Cleere, "Introduction: the Rationale of Archaeological Heritage Management", p 11; National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, pp 40-44.

37. I.M. Lombard, "The Choice of a Site for the Voortrekker Monument", in Board of Control of the Voortrekker Monument, *The Voortrekker Monument Pretoria, official guide* (Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria, n.d.), p 27.

38. I. Vermeulen, *Man en Monument, die Lewe en Werk van Gerard Moerdijk* (Van Schaik, Pretoria, 1999), p 129.

39. O.J.O. Ferreira, "Die Geskiedenis van die Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee." M.A. verhandeling, Universiteit van Pretoria, 1970, p 68.

The historical importance of the Schanskop site (which would positively affect the Voortrekker Monument site) was further accentuated when this particular fort, together with the other three Anglo-Boer War forts around Pretoria, were declared national monuments in 1938.⁴⁰ In the same year, the Symbolic Ox-Wagon Trek from Cape Town to Pretoria (marking the centenary of the Great Trek), and the laying of the cornerstone of the Voortrekker Monument on 16 December 1938, which was attended by approximately 150 000 Afrikaners,⁴¹ drew further attention to this site. The awakening of Afrikaner nationalism called for this monument, and it in turn would generate (Afrikaner) nationalism in the years to come. Important political and cultural events hosted on this site would, through the years, render this area amongst Afrikaners as one of the best-known heritage sites in the country.

In 1949, Portions 1 and 5 of the farm Groenkloof (valued at £3 700), the property of the then City Council of Pretoria and the site on which the Voortrekker Monument had just been constructed, were donated to the newly elected Nationalist Government of the Union of South Africa.⁴² The latter showed interest in the Voortrekker Monument and regarded it of such great national importance that it sought representation on the Central National Monuments Committee (CNMC), which was formed to oversee all matters pertaining to the final completion of this monument. Government also finally approved the design, which was more imposing than originally intended by the CNMC, and offered to meet any deficit in cost that might arise.⁴³

The Voortrekker Monument was inaugurated on 16 December 1949. Was it a coincidence that it occurred barely a year after the Nationalist Party, under the leadership of Doctor D.F. Malan, came to power?⁴⁴ The Nationalist Party was a manifestation of the Afrikaner's long fight for self-rule and independence, free from the oppression of the British Empire. This conflict started with the Great Trek and gained momentum during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Many hardships were endured during these two epic historical events, but no one could

40. A.C. van Vollenhoven, *Die Militêre Fortifikasies van Pretoria 1880-1902: 'n Studie in die Historiese Argeologie* (Heinekor, Pretoria, 1995), p 137.
41. E.G. Jansen, "The Centenary and Laying of the Foundation Stone", in Board of Control of the Voortrekker Monument, *The Voortrekker Monument*, p 69.
42. Deed of Transfer, No 17686 of 1949 (Deeds Office, Pretoria), pp 1-3.
43. E.G. Jansen, "The Growth of an Idea", in Board of Control of the Voortrekker Monument, *The Voortrekker Monument*, pp 24-25.
44. D.W. Krüger, "Die Bondgenootskap tussen Nasionalisme en Arbeid, 1924-1933", in A.J.H. van der Walt (red.), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* (Nasou Beperk, Kaapstad, 1977), p 559.

foresee the tremendous role the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek, the laying of the corner-stone of the Voortrekker Monument⁴⁵ and its inauguration would play in the awakening of this young nation. These were probably some of the most important events in the history of Afrikaner nationalism.

The inauguration was indeed another highlight in Afrikaner history. This is clear from the fact that approximately 250 000 people⁴⁶ attended the event, which lasted three days. Several VIP speakers voiced the *raison d'être* for this monument at the inauguration. Prime Minister D.F. Malan said in his speech:

With deep respect and thanksgiving we now pay tribute to the Voortrekkers for the tough perseverance and heroism, which enabled them, in spite of the greatest privations, to lay the foundation for a White Christian civilisation in a greater South Africa.⁴⁷

Krüger in fact ascribes the large number of people attending the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument to an already existing and growing Afrikaner solidarity.⁴⁸ This statement manifests itself in the words of the then Administrator of the Transvaal, Doctor W. Nicol:

The monument should engender pride in the nation of heroes which endured the hardships of the Great Trek. It should not only deepen and arouse a love for the country for which they sacrificed so much, but it should also strengthen faith in the God in whom they trusted. This should serve as an inspiration for self-dedication to the welfare of the nation they founded.⁴⁹

The realisation of this monument was a dream come true in the history of the developing Afrikaner nation, and played a very important role in establishing its cultural identity. Crampton states that Afrikaner nationalism first emerged in the 1870s and did not gain mass popularity until the 1930s. At that time, new urban-based Afrikaans-speaking

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45. A.N. Pelzer, "The Historical Background to the Voortrekker Monument", in Board of Control of the Voortrekker Monument, *The Voortrekker Monument*, p 25.
 46. B.K. Murray en A.W. Stadler, "Van Pakt tot die Begin van Apartheid, 1924-1947", in Cameron en Spies (reds.), *Nuwe Geskiedenis*, p 259.
 47. D.F. Malan, "Opening Speech", in Anonymous, *Historical Record of the Opening of the Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria* (Voortrekker Monument Inauguration Committee, Pretoria 1949), p 19.
 48. Krüger, "Die Bondgenootskap", p 573.
 49. W. Nicol, "Foreword", in Board of Control of the Voortrekker Monument, *The Voortrekker Monument*, p 12.

intellectuals identified and explained a number of structural crises in the South African economy and the threat these posed to the livelihood of Afrikaans speakers.⁵⁰

After the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument in December 1949, it was decided that the CNMC had served its purpose and that the Monument would, in future, be managed by a management council (*beheerraad*). In 1951 procedural rules were established which described the purpose of this council, its constitution and funding.⁵¹

According to Du Bruyn, most of the Afrikaners see the Great Trek as a heroic period during which many of their heroes came to the fore; it was a period of strife, suffering and sacrifice in exchange for freedom.⁵² This attitude, however, changed after 1961, when a notable cooling in the historical conscience of the Afrikaner became apparent.⁵³ This could probably be ascribed to the fact that the Afrikaner's republican ideal had been achieved, but, according to Allen, the gradual resurgence of African nationalism and the death of Doctor H.F. Verwoerd in the 1960s caused turmoil in white Afrikaans South Africa.⁵⁴

Cultural significance of the Voortrekker Monument for Afrikaners since 1994

In 1992 the site, which is bordered by the Old Johannesburg Road to the north and west, the Ben Schoeman Freeway in the east and Eeufees Avenue in the south, was declared a nature reserve.⁵⁵ The 340 hectare Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site, includes various cultural and heritage resources, such as a Nederlandsche Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorweg-Maatschappij (NZASM) bridge (ca 1890s), Fort Schanskop (1897), a stone cairn (1938), and most importantly, the Voortrekker Monument (1949).

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50. A. Crampton, "The Voortrekker Monument ...", in Anonymous, *Political Geography*, 20, 2001, p 224.
 51. Voortrekkermonument Argief, AB-001, Beheerraad van die Voortrekkermonument, Reglement, 1951, pp 1-3.
 52. Du Bruyn, "Die Groot Trek", p 127.
 53. Van Jaarsveld, "Die Groot Trek", p 119.
 54. G. Allen, "The Volkscustodian and the Professor", *Historia*, 47, 2, November 2002, pp 400-401.
 55. Official Gazette No 4839, Administrator's Notice 270 of 24 June 1992, Nature Conservation Ordinance No 12 of 1983, p 9.

The first step towards the transformation of the latter was taken in 1993, when it was decided to break the ties with the former Transvaal Provincial Administration and form a Section 21, non-profit company, which became known as the “Voortrekkermonument en Natuurreservaat”, registration number 1993/006713/08.⁵⁶ Its council (*beheerraad*) would in future be known as the Board of Directors (*Direksie*).

With the founding of a democratic South Africa in 1994, the Afrikaners had finally lost their political stronghold. The future of so-called “Afrikaner” monuments such as the Voortrekker Monument, also seemed to hang in the balance. Based on experience gained from countries that had gone through the democratisation process, these monuments could be expected either to lose their significance, be destroyed and replaced, or simply be appropriated.

By 1999, the year in which the fiftieth anniversary of the Voortrekker Monument was celebrated, this Monument was in dire need of not only physical renovations. It was also imperative that perceptions about this erstwhile “Afrikaner monument to Apartheid”, had to be redressed. Negative, even derogatory articles in the media, as well as a decline in visitor numbers due to apathy amongst Afrikaners and other South African cultural groups, forced the then Managing Council to reconsider the entire management of this monument.

A younger, more dynamic council, who realised that change was essential if this Afrikaner monument was to survive in a post-apartheid society, was appointed. Change had to be brought about responsibly in order to prevent the possible estrangement of a small but important power base, whilst at the same time inducing a shift in the perceptions of other cultural groups. Sustainable development was especially important for the future of the Monument, as it had registered as a Section 21, non-profit company in 1993, and consequently did not qualify for subsidies from the State.

Although this might have seemed like a daunting task at the time, the change that took place in South Africa after the first democratic election of 1994, ironically enough also provided new opportunities, which, if utilised effectively, could serve the Monument’s council well in dealing with the challenges confronting them.

56. Voortrekkermonument Argief, A-019, Akte van Oprigting van ’n Maatskappy sonder ’n Aandelekapitaal [Artikel 54(1); regulasie 17 (1) en 17(3)], 1973, p 1.

These opportunities included (a) the realisation by Government that tourism could play an important role in improving the economy; and (b) the commitment of the State to the conservation and development of the unique South African cultural heritage which, in turn, could also further the development of South African cultural identities.

It was only in 1999 that the Board of Directors appointed a chief executive officer (CEO) and staff members to manage the site. One of the first aims of the new management was to apply to the then National Monuments Council to investigate the possibility of declaring the Voortrekker Monument as a national monument. However, according to the regulations in the National Monuments Act of 1969, amended in 1986, only structures of fifty years and older could be protected and declared as National Monuments.⁵⁷

Based on its age, the Voortrekker Monument could possibly have qualified, but Act 25 of 1999, which stipulates that structures have to be at least sixty years old to qualify for protection, replaced the Act of 1969. That meant that the Monument still did not qualify. The new Act further provides for SAHRA, in consultation with the Minister and members of the executive councils of every province, to establish a system of grading for places and objects according to their "significance".⁵⁸ At this stage the grading system has yet to be implemented.

The urgency of drafting and implementing a management plan for the Voortrekker Monument prompted its management to do research based on existing plans of similar institutions. Management plans for heritage sites across the world are available from many sources, but examples of such plans for Section 21 companies, with reference to South Africa specifically, could however not be located. Central, provincial and local government, universities and private companies manage most heritage sites and museums in South Africa, and there are also a few sites and collections owned by individuals which are open to the public. In addition, many private "trusts" care for sites, buildings or heritage in general. Two such trusts, managing sites of cultural historical significance to the Afrikaner cultural group in particular, were identified. The first is the *Volkseie Museumtrust* (the Peoples' Museum Trust) which

57. P. Pistorius, "Legislation and the National Monuments Act", in J. Deacon (ed), *Monuments and Sites, South Africa, ICOMOS, National Committee 11th General Assembly* (State Printing Corporation, Sri Lanka, 1996), p 10.

58. National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, p 18.

manages the Majuba Battlefield and the Strijdom House Museum.⁵⁹ The Majuba Battlefield is situated on the border between Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, where the forces of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek defeated a British force, bringing an end to the First Anglo-Boer War of 1880-1881.⁶⁰ The second is the house in Nylstroom, property of the late Advocate J.G. Strijdom, Prime Minister of the Republic of South Africa between 1954 and 1958.⁶¹ The Women's Memorial Trust in Bloemfontein⁶² manages the monument built and inaugurated in 1913 to commemorate the South African women and children who lost their lives during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).⁶³

As far as could be determined, there are two other Section 21 companies besides the Voortrekker Monument, that control heritage sites. They are the Vegkop Company, governing the battlefield of the same name near Heilbron in the Free State,⁶⁴ where Voortrekker leader Hendrik Potgieter's following survived an attack by the Ndebeles of Mzilikazi in 1836⁶⁵; and the Museum Park Company in the centre of Pretoria City. The latter was established in 1995, mainly to develop the tourism potential of several national and metro museums in the area and to contribute to the improvement of the city.⁶⁶ A third Section 21 company, the *Stigting vir die Bloedriviergelofteterrein* (Foundation for the Blood River Heritage Site), which administered the Blood River Battlefield in KwaZulu-Natal, where the Voortrekker commando of Andries Pretorius defeated Dingane's Zulu force in 1838⁶⁷, was taken over by the management of the Voortrekker Monument in 2003.⁶⁸

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59. Oral information: J. Wolfaardt, Council Member of the *Volkseie Museumtrust*, Pretoria, 2 October 2002.
 60. D.H. Heydenrych, "Die Boererepublieke, 1852-1881", in Cameron en Spies (reds.), *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, p 160.
 61. D.W. Krüger en C.J. Beyers (reds.), *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek III* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1977), pp 791, 792.
 62. Oral information: Colonel F. Jacobs, Director: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein, 2 October 2002.
 63. M.J. Swart (redaksionele voorsitter), *Afrikanerbakens* (Nasionale Boekdrukkery, Kaapstad, 1988), p 102.
 64. Oral information: Doctor J. Herman, Council Member: Vegkop Trust, Heilbron, 3 October 2002.
 65. Du Bruyn, "Die Groot Trek", p 131.
 66. Oral information: J.F.T. Bartmann, Manager: Museum Park, Pretoria, 18 September 2002.
 67. Du Bruyn, "Die Groot Trek", p 136.
 68. Oral information: H. de Wet, Chief Executive Officer: F.A.K, Pretoria, and Chairperson of the Foundation of the Blood River Heritage Site, 21 April 2002.

Apart from the basic similarities regarding their Memoranda of Association and other Statutes, determined by the South African Companies Act of 1973, these Section 21 companies would, given their diverse themes and circumstances, have different aims, goals, strategies and management structures.

Since its completion in 1949, the Voortrekker Monument has been a source of debate and has managed to evoke strong emotions amongst South Africans from all walks of life. These debates have not abated, but the focus seems to have shifted from severe criticism by other cultural groups of the Monument and what it represented in the past, to debates amongst Afrikaners over the management of the Monument and the course it has decided to take. For example, the Voortrekker Monument recently developed into a subject of discussion amongst different Afrikaner political groups.⁶⁹ The invitation extended by Management to former State President Nelson Mandela to deliver a speech at the unveiling of an Anglo-Boer War statue of the Boer scout Danie Theron on the Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site on 6 March 2002, was the topic of this debate. The conservative groups perceived the action as a gross injustice to the Afrikaner people,⁷⁰ while the majority on the other hand regarded it as an honour that a person of Mandela's stature acknowledged an Afrikaner hero,⁷¹ thus acknowledging their history and contribution to the country's development. Former State President Mandela's acceptance of the invitation would seem to be a major step forward in the reconciliatory process in which the Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site hoped to participate.⁷²

After Mandela's visit in 2002 and the widespread, contrasting reaction this event caused from all walks of political life, the Monument was again in the news when an international fashion show was hosted in the Cenotaph Hall in May 2004. Bongani Madondo asked whether it was "... cultural suicide or political correctness of the Voortrekker Monument, once the bastion of Afrikaner culture and pride, to throw a

69. T. du Plessis, "Nie net ANC-seine is verwarrend nie, dis kortsigtig om Mandela af te jak", *Rapport*, 3 Maart 2002, p 16.

70. Anoniem, "Mandela loop hom vas met onthulling van Danie Theron-beeld", *Die Afrikaner*, 7 Maart 2002, pp 1, 2, 11; Y. Grimbeek, "Madiba's tribute to Danie Theron", *Pretoria News*, 7 March 2002, p 4.

71. J. Kilian, "ANC moet Mandela se Theron-gebaar opvolg", *Rapport*, 10 Maart 2002, p 14.

72. Nelson Mandela Foundation, *Address by former President Nelson Mandela during the unveiling of the Danie Theron Statue, Fort Schanskop, Thaba Tshwane*, 6 March 2002.

Pan African fashion bash ...?”⁷³ Designers and models, mostly from African states, participated in this event, which once again gave rise to all kinds of reaction ranging from vehement outcries of protest from conservatives to appreciative comments in daily newspapers.⁷⁴

Letters and e-mails of discontent and protest, as well as congratulatory messages at this “bold step”, poured in. The Voortrekker Monument may have gained ground as an institution of national cultural significance and acceptance on national and even international level, but the conservative protests could not be ignored. Council was forced to issue a statement in which a differentiation of significance of the various levels within the Monument was announced: The Cenotaph Hall is, for example, the most significant as it houses the cenotaph (empty grave), representative of all the pioneers who made the highest sacrifice for their country – hence the words *Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika* (We for thee South Africa) inscribed on the cenotaph. The Heroes Hall above the cenotaph where different events of the Great Trek are told in relief on a marble frieze is less significant, but still very important. The lookout point at the top, as well as the museum in the basement, is not part of the symbolism of the Monument and therefore less significant. The nature of activities presented within the Monument would in future be determined by the significance and sensitivity attached to these levels.

Cultural significance of the Voortrekker Monument for other cultural groups since 1994

It is very difficult to determine the significance of the Voortrekker Monument for other cultural groups before the 1990s. Given the political situation and the perceptions that the Voortrekker Monument was an “icon to apartheid”, one can safely assume that it was generally ignored and despised amongst black cultural groups and that the English-speaking community was indifferent to it. At history workshops in the early 1990s, English-speaking academics and Afrikaner liberals increasingly criticized this monument and what it stood for.⁷⁵

73. B. Madondo, “Trekker Chic”, *Sunday Times Lifestyle*, 2 May 2004, p 5.

74. C. Pretorius, “Monumental Fashion Show in Pretoria”, *This Day*, 31 March 2004, p 1; M. Waldner, “Fashion Politics favour Afro-chic”, *City Press*, 4 April 2004, p 4; E. Williamson, “Ou Rokke en Kappies maak plek vir Glans”, *Die Burger*, 1 April 2004, p 3.

75. E. Delmont, “The Voortrekker Monument: Monolith to Myth”, *South African Historical Journal*, 29, 1993, pp 76-77.

After the national election of 1994, there was talk of appropriating the lower level or Cenotaph Hall in the Voortrekker Monument for an exhibition to commemorate the ANC struggle against white minority rule. The ANC government thus intended to appropriate for themselves that which they opposed – Afrikaner domination as denoted by a monumental fortress that still draws more visitors than any other monument or museum in South Africa.⁷⁶

Although this never happened and Government subsequently decided to construct a separate complex called Freedom Park on an adjacent hill to commemorate the African nationalistic struggle, the Voortrekker Monument had to reposition itself to play a new role and remain relevant in the new South Africa. The management of the Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site would like to see the Monument play a role in creating a new South African cultural identity where the different cultures can find a platform to express themselves in an attempt to understand one another better.⁷⁷ This could be a very difficult task. Aucamp states that monuments and memorials could re-activate old feelings of hatred based on injustices of the past⁷⁸ – a statement that is proven by Matshikiza in his article, *An epitaph of smoke and mirrors*. In this article Matshikiza describes his recent visit to the Voortrekker Monument as a “terrible experience”⁷⁹ despite all the attempts that the management of the Monument have made to open up the site to all South Africans.

The end of 2004 brought about yet another interesting development when the CEO, as well as the then Manager of Professional Services of the Voortrekker Monument, was approached by the Freedom Park Trust to participate in a project to involve more whites in the celebrations on 16 December, the National Day of Reconciliation. A committee of five was formed to organise different events in the different provinces.⁸⁰

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76. Maré, “The Aesthetics of Ideology”, p 19. It is not clear on what evidence Maré bases her statement of the numbers of visitors to museums and monuments, and the authors do not necessarily agree with Maré in this regard. According to the Voortrekker Monument’s statistics, 200 000 paying visitors visited the site in 2003.
 77. Personal information: General G.N. Opperman, Chief Executive Officer: Voortrekker Monument, 13 June 2001.
 78. H. Aucamp, “Argitektuur ’n stil Gebaar”, *Die Burger*, 26 January 2002, s.p.
 79. J. Matshikiza, “An Epitaph of Smoke and Mirrors”, *Mail & Guardian*, 21 June 2002, p 23.
 80. Doctor W. Serote, Chief Executive Officer of the Freedom Park Trust, called the first meetings in July 2004. The cleansing and healing ceremonies that were held on 16 December 2003 did not involve the white community and it

Although this was seen as another step towards reconciliation and nation building, the event at the Voortrekker Monument showed very little signs of the new South Africa, according to the *Sowetan*. Only one black couple could be seen at the church service at the Voortrekker Monument. Mandla Mnyakeni said he liked the place because it had a rich history especially in respect of his Ndebele tribe. The first time he visited the Monument he learned that the Ndebele lived in this place “before we were forced out by the Boers.”⁸¹ When interviewed, another visitor to the Voortrekker Monument, Freda Henning, stated that “it felt good to celebrate with all the people what South Africans had fought for.” She started the day in Church Street where she visited the museums and planned to move on to Freedom Park after the event at the Monument.⁸²

Most recent developments saw, amongst others, the Voortrekker Monument being a clue in the Highveld Stereo (FM 94.7) morning show, *The rude awakening* on 15 September 2005, management being approached by the national monthly *The Property Magazine* for a feature article in the edition of October 2005,⁸³ the Monument featuring in one of the episodes of the popular soap opera, *Egoli*, in November 2005 and the South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance in Cape Town asking for permission to use the Voortrekker Monument as a symbol of true Afrikaner culture in an animation project, opposing the Eiffel Tower as a symbol of French Culture, as part of the fourth year syllabus and to be completed in December 2005.⁸⁴

The most exciting and significant recent development which took place in October 2005, has been the nomination of the Voortrekker Monument by the *Public Management Review* as the “Most exciting / interesting heritage site in Gauteng”. This nomination was based on the survey results of the Gauteng Provincial Survey conducted during July and August 2005. The following criteria were used: companies / institutions that have done most to enhance economic growth and development in the province; management and corporate governance. A

was hoped that by changing the format of these events, more South African whites would attend. Cleansing and healing appeared to be foreign concepts to the average white South African.

81. V. Ndlovu, “Sure we’re reconciled – but separately”, *Sowetan*, 17 December 2004, p 7.
82. Ndlovu, “Sure we’re reconciled”, p 7.
83. E-mail correspondence: katy@thepropertymag.com, 26 August 2005; K. Chance, “Monumental Effort”, *The Property Magazine, Gauteng*, October 2005, pp 43-47.
84. E-mail correspondence: Andrew Faure, fourth year student, 14 September 2005.

total rating of 4,33 out of a possible 5 was achieved and the Voortrekker Monument, together with the Apartheid Museum received the “Diamond Arrow Award” for this feat.⁸⁵

These developments undoubtedly indicate a greater leniency towards the Voortrekker Monument and a greater overall acceptance of this structure as part of the everyday life of all communities.

A new statement of significance for the Voortrekker Monument

Having considered all of these factors, it is clear that the Voortrekker Monument is indeed a unique monument, in a unique position with much potential to benefit from the present political, cultural and economic climate, and indeed even to play a leading role in heritage management in post-apartheid South Africa.

The Voortrekker Monument’s significance is basically associative or symbolic and ranges from “holy ground” and symbol of Afrikaner nationalism for many, to an obsolete, monolithic monument for many others.⁸⁶ For certain groups within the Afrikaner culture, the entire Monument is a symbol of independence and achievement. Many other South African cultural groups have however, until recently, seen it as a symbol of oppression and denial during the apartheid years.⁸⁷

Diverse opinions regarding other criteria of significance such as the aesthetic and architectural significance of the Monument abound. Some regard it as an architectural work of art, whilst others describe it as a “concrete toaster” or a piece of fascist architecture.⁸⁸

The twenty-first century seems to have brought about many changes – also in respect of apparently obsolete monuments such as the Voortrekker Monument. As early as 1992, Mewa Ramgobin, cultural leader of the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal, stated that the Voortrekker Monument must be conserved as part of the country’s heritage.⁸⁹ More

85. Award ceremony, Bryanston Country Club, 30 September 2005; G. Uys, “Monument Vereer met Toekenning, Erfenisskat vir alle mense”, *Tshwane Beeld*, 5 Oktober 2005, p 2.

86. J. Joubert en J. de Villiers, “Die Monument word 50 jaar in nuwe land”, *Rapport Perspektief*, 12 Desember 1999, pp 1, 3.

87. Coetzee, “Cultural resources”, p 30.

88. Joubert en De Villiers, “Die Monument word 50 jaar”, p 1.

89. Joubert en De Villiers, “Die Monument word 50 jaar”, p 3.

and more South Africans from different cultural backgrounds seem to accept the Monument as part of their common heritage.⁹⁰ Currently it is without doubt the most visited Afrikaner cultural heritage site in the country. A steady increase in visitor numbers (of both local and overseas origin⁹¹), the widely diverse events presented on the site by management and other organisations alike, positive coverage in the media and the goodwill of South Africans across the cultural and political spectrum, could be seen as a turning-point in the survival of this heritage site.

The time has come for the Voortrekker Monument to reassess its significance based on the criteria of the South African Heritage Resources Act. Whilst it is unreasonable to expect all cultures to identify with it in the same manner and with the same intensity, management continues to work hard and to implement various strategies to at least turn the Voortrekker Monument into a site that will eventually be accepted by all cultural groups as part of their heritage. With this in mind, the management of the Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site will have to draft a summarized, as well as detailed statement of significance, enabling them to finalise a management plan and to position themselves favourably to be graded as a National Heritage Site by 2009.

Conclusion

Measured against the criteria of the South African Heritage Resources Act and factors to be considered when the significance of a heritage site is determined, the Voortrekker Monument certainly is one of the most interesting, contentious monuments in South Africa. Its architecture is unique.⁹² Its marble frieze is one of the largest in the world and one of the three most important historical tapestries in Africa (and one of the six most important in the world) forms a part of its exhibitions.⁹³ Given these features, together with the significance of its architect, as well as the

90. Personal information: General G.N. Opperman, Chief Executive Officer: Voortrekker Monument, 8 October 2001.

91. Approximately 85 per cent of the visitors to the Voortrekker Monument are from abroad.

92. The Voortrekker Monument is the only Art Deco building of its kind in South Africa and displays a combination of European and African characteristics. The opening in the cupola in the domed roof was designed in such a way that at noon on 16 December each year, a ray of sunlight shines directly on the cenotaph, illuminating the words *Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika* (We for thee South Africa).

93. D. Byrne, professional seamstress, P.O. Box 87447, Houghton, 28 September 2005.

Monument's meaningfulness to especially the Afrikaner people and their cultural history, it would be difficult to disagree with the statement that this indeed is a heritage site of national significance.

The Voortrekker Monument seemed to have played a major part in the "coming of age" of the Afrikaner nation with an own, very distinct identity in the 1930s and 1940s. It was further utilised by the Nationalist Party in subsequent years to further its "Afrikaner nation building cause". The Monument's attempts to play a constructive role in the establishment of a new South African identity in the post-apartheid era, although plagued with difficulties, equally cannot be ignored.

Since 1994, the management's increased nation building and reconciliation activities, and attempts to become inclusive and part of the new South Africa, have constantly been met with protests from the more conservative sections within the Afrikaner community. One could possibly argue that the activities surrounding this monument at least provide food for thought and, judged by public response, give rise to some kind of public protest, but it is quite obvious that the divide between Afrikaners of different political convictions seems to be on the increase – certainly as far as their perception of the Voortrekker Monument and its role in the new South Africa goes.

Whereas this erstwhile Afrikaner nation bastion seems to have succeeded in gradually changing perceptions about itself and has become more acceptable to most informed South Africans, the dream of a unified Afrikaans cultural group seems to be gradually slipping away.

It is hoped that when SAHRA is eventually geared for the re-grading of South African monuments and sites, the cultural significance of the Voortrekker Monument will be regarded within the changing context of the new South Africa. By grading the Monument as a Grade I heritage site, the fact that certain periods in our common heritage, namely the Great Trek, but also Afrikaner nationalism existed, will be acknowledged. Whether we can identify with this fact or not, it significantly changed the course of our South African history.

Abstract

The major focus of this article is the cultural significance and relevance of the Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site in a new democratic South Africa. Heritage plays an increasingly important role in the forming of our twenty-first century society. Various disciplines have not only taken cognisance of this fact, but have incorporated the study of heritage and its management in their study modules. The Voortrekker Monument and the part of our history which it represents, has played a major role in the cultural history of the Afrikaners and have significantly influenced the lives of many other individuals from other cultural groups in southern Africa. Will this so-called erstwhile bastion of Afrikaner nationalism withstand the test of time and make a contribution to the well-being of all South Africans in a new democracy? The level of cultural maturity and development of the people of South Africa will eventually play a major part in determining the fate of this monument.

Opsomming

Die Voortrekkermonument Erfenisterrein: 'n Nuwe Betekenisverklaring

Die vernaamste fokus van hierdie artikel is die kulturele betekenis en relevansie van die Voortrekkermonument Erfenisterrein in 'n nuwe, demokratiese Suid-Afrika. Erfenis speel 'n toenemend belangrike rol in die vorming van ons een-en-twintigste-eeuse samelewing. Verskeie dissiplines het nie alleen reeds van hierdie feit kennis geneem nie, maar ook die bestudering van erfenis en die bestuur daarvan in hulle studiemodules ingesluit. Die Voortrekkermonument en die gedeelte van ons geskiedenis wat dit verteenwoordig, het 'n groot rol in die kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner gespeel en ook die lewens van vele ander individue van ander kultuurgroepe in Suider-Afrika beduidend beïnvloed. Sal hierdie eertydse bastion van Afrikanernasionalisme die toets van die tyd weerstaan en 'n bydrae maak tot die welstand van alle Suid-Afrikaners in 'n nuwe demokrasie? Die vlak van kulturele volwassenheid en ontwikkeling van die mense van Suid-Afrika sal uiteindelik 'n groot rol speel in die bepaling van die lot van hierdie monument.

Key words

Afrikaner cultural heritage, conservation, cultural identity, cultural resources, cultural significance, heritage legislation, heritage management, monument, National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999, Voortrekker Monument, Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site.

Sleutelwoorde

Afrikanerkultuurerfenis, bewaring, kulturele identiteit, kulturele hulpbronne, kulturele betekenis, erfeniswetgewing, erfenisbestuur, monument, Nasionale Erfenishulpbronne Wet, Nr 25 van 1999, Voortrekkermonument, Voortrekkermonument Erfenisterrein.