

# INNOVATIVE WAYS TO TEACH THE YOUTH LESSONS FROM SOUTH AFRICA'S HISTORICAL LEGACIES

**SADFA Project: The heritage connection – enrich your future!**

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## ***Abstract***

*This article explains a creative way in which lessons from history may in future be presented to a new generation. This will be made possible by utilising new technology and ingenuity to make history educational and entertaining at the same time. Outside the classroom the SADFA Project also intends to create jobs for communities throughout South Africa. Military veterans with a passion to preserve the past and pass on a legacy to future generations will be invited to mentor the programme, together with historians and history enthusiasts. The aim is to present South Africa's joint history in a new and exciting way to contribute to the knowledge of future generations about how this country came about. Different cultures should gain respect for each other's history in the process.*

**Keywords:** Heritage; Military Veterans; Edutainment; Treasure hunting; Genealogy; Geocaching; QR Codes; Preservation; Job creation in History; Amazing Race.

## **Introduction**

The great German militarist Bismarck once made the remark: "Fools say they learn by experience. I learn by the experience of others" (Brownson, 1875:39). Despite the History school syllabus that has been changed since the 1990's to accommodate a more all-inclusive South African history, it seems that black and white school learners across the board still show very little knowledge of each other's past, especially of the events that shaped the South African landscape before 1976. Furthermore, the curriculum seems to foster a more socio-political awareness and sensitivity to cultural beliefs, prejudices and practices in our society (DoBE, 2011:3-4). Historical and cultural heritage sites in South Africa can play a major role in gaining knowledge of

the pre-1976 era, but they are unfortunately very seldom visited by learners. An attack on South Africa's national history legacy by defacing monuments is not very complimentary to what History and historical legacies aspire to. A tendency to repeat past wrongdoings will certainly impact negatively on a balanced perspective on what actually happened. An all-inclusive vision can be achieved by a creative re-imagining of our public spaces and monuments.

The South African Defence Force Association (SADFA) strives to make learners more aware of their heritage. This organisation is a Section 21 non-profit company (NPC) that was formed in 2008 as a military veterans' organization and has as its objectives to commemorate, give recognition to and encourage reconciliation.

The SADFA has identified the legacy that they wish to leave behind after having accomplished the project, as to have:

- inspired and equipped people to fulfil their dreams and reach their potential;
- created an awareness about military veterans and their role in our democracy;
- pursued both financial success and made a community impact as passionate social entrepreneurs;
- played a part in building a positive future for South Africa.

The discussion will focus on what gave birth to the idea, and how it is foreseen to be implemented.

### **An idea is born**

I was working at the Heritage Foundation at the Voortrekker Monument in 2013. My responsibility was to maintain the historical concentration camp graveyard sites of the Anglo-Boer (South African) War (1899-1902). Fifty concentration camps for white women and children were established as part of Lord Kitchener's "scorched earth policy" (Pretorius, 2001) in which 34011 inhabitants subsequently died (Wessels & Raath, 2012:245-252). In the Irene Camp alone, for example, 1238 deaths occurred (Van Rensburg, 1980:125).

A lot of effort went into maintaining and improving the concentration camp graveyard sites, but I soon came to the realisation that we attracted hardly any visitors at all. After having consulted the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for the different grades in History, I discovered that the topic of the Anglo-Boer (South African) War is only prescribed for

Grade 10 learners in their second semester. Grade 10 History learners are also expected to conduct a heritage investigation as part of their formal assessment programme (DoBE, 2011:16-30). This gave rise to the idea of creating a cellular phone application in an effort to bring learners to visit these sites in support of their practical assignments.

The *South African heritage and battlefields application (App)* was developed and launched on the Amazon.com platform in 2014. Different icons indicate the main items: *Battlefields 1650-1900; Monuments of South Africa; Concentration camps; South African Wars 1900-2000; History; Videos; Treasure hunts; Where to stay; Images of historical places and things; Websites; Join our social media through Facebook; Museums*; and *Join our social responsibility program creating jobs and help preserve our heritage sites*. The App is currently only available for Symbian phones, but will be expanded to all smart phones in future. It can be downloaded free of charge from the Amazon App store under the name *South African battlefields*. The maps are GPS enabled and will show the user how to get to heritage sites with GPS coordinates and links to relevant websites. This is a must have for every family going on holiday. It surely can make road trips interesting and memorable. “The use of the Internet together with multimedia technology could be useful in History teaching to make the learning experience ‘magical’” (De Sousa & Van Eeden, 2009:68).

Shortly after launching the App a call was received from a young entrepreneur, Twin Mosia, living in the town of Petrus Steyn in the Orange Free State. He indicated that he was very interested in the history of black concentration camp sites, and was planning to undertake a bicycle tour to all these places. It is not well known that during the war 64 separate camps were erected for blacks. About 18 000 to 22 000 deaths were recorded in these camps (Wessels & Raath, 2012:245-252). Mosia planned to collect two stones from each concentration camp site in South Africa and take them back to his hometown, where his intention was to build a monument to attract tourists to his town. He felt he had to do something for his people, as there is barely any work opportunities in Petrus Steyn for its inhabitants. Mosia’s dream inspired the *The heritage connection: Enrich your future project*.

### **The heritage connection: Enrich your future project (HCEYFP)**

The aim of the HCEYFP is to take some of the lessons of the past and together build a better future for all in South Africa, while the sub-theme of

the project is: “Turning Swords into Ploughshares”.

The SADFA concept for this project is to have nine provincial teams consisting of military veterans, school children and history enthusiasts simultaneously participating in an “Amazing Race”, visiting each and every concentration camp around South Africa over the period 1-15 December 2017, planting commemoration crosses as they go, and collecting two stones from each site. (See the routes on the map.) This will culminate in the building of a Reconciliation Monument at the Petrus Steyn Station Heritage Site on 16 December 2017. Each town along the route will form a local Heritage Committee, responsible for preparing and hosting the events and mobilising their own community in the process. Local, national and international media coverage will be arranged for the whole event. The Afrikaans Language and Culture Association (Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging (ATKV)) and Toastmasters South Africa will assist in presenting a national competition and provide training to secondary school learners to select the main speakers at each event on the theme: “What lessons can be taken from this tragedy 115 years ago to make South Africa the country of our Future?” The best speaker will have the stage at the final event on 16 December 2017.

The above-mentioned endeavour will promote the efforts of the Elandskop Museum in Petrus Steyn to establish itself as a tourist attraction. It should also be an inspiration to many others to take the initiative the same way as Twin Mosia is doing, to make a difference in their home-town.

Participating in this Amazing Race in 2017 will be military veterans from all over the spectrum: uMkhonto weSizwe (MK), the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA), the Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA), the veterans belonging to the Transkei; Bophuthatswana; Venda; Ciskei; the Council of Military Veterans’ Organizations (CMVO), the Memorable Order of Tin Hats (M.O.T.H.), the SA Legion, 32 Battalion, 61 Mechanised Battalion Group and the Infantry Association, amongst others. The aim will be to demonstrate solidarity and a serious commitment to turn swords into ploughshares and to together, using a host of skills and experience, assist in building a better future for all South Africans.

### ***Expansion plans***

To enhance experiences and promote general tourism to each of the concentration camps and other historical sites throughout South Africa, the

following will also be undertaken:

- The *Heritage Atlas of South Africa*, based on the South African school syllabi, is currently being compiled by a group of renowned historians. It will contain the most prominent historical and cultural sites in our country, with place for learners to paste the unique stamps of the treasures found on the different sites, as well as their pictures and own notes of each place visited. The aim is to ensure that every learner receives an atlas, and that it becomes a precious hands-on tool for exploring history. The Department of Basic Education will also be approached to become actively involved and teachers will motivate learners to visit these sites on a regular basis.
- On each concentration camp site a *Treasure hunt* is currently being developed. This will enable every South African visitor and tourists interested in discovering what really happened on the site, to with the aid of pictures, videos and text, linking into family genealogy, utilising the Geocaching and Quick Response (QR) Code (a type of matrix barcode) techniques, finding the hidden treasure, and learning through unique “Edutainment”, come into contact with the realities of the past. (See the brochure). Access will also be through the App as mentioned earlier, which is currently available in five languages: Afrikaans, English, German, Zulu and SeSotho.
- The SADFA is currently also negotiating with the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) to be contracted to maintain and improve all the concentration camps, battlefields and cultural heritage sites throughout the country. Once this project has been approved, the plan is to create a Co-op for each site, consisting of local people under the mentorship of a knowledgeable veteran or historian. The members will then be trained as official local tour guides as well as security personnel to ensure the sites are well maintained, kept safe and developed to become real tourist attractions.

Once the above-mentioned goals have been reached, the offering will be expanded to all other heritage sites where a substantial and transferable heritage exists to be incorporated into class activities in History, as well as to be easy accessible to overseas tourists and South Africans exploring the past from the present.

### ***Partnering***

Partners in the SADFA endeavour are some well-known historians from universities throughout South Africa, the Voortrekker Monument and

Heritage Foundation, Freedom Park and the Nelson Mandela Foundation, as well as curators of heritage sites throughout the country.

### ***Educator participation pivotal***

The SADFA has applied to the National Lottery Fund for seed capital to launch the multifaceted SADFA project in 2017. All educators of History at all educational levels are encouraged to get involved and to make contact with us at [jan@streetsafe.co.za](mailto:jan@streetsafe.co.za) should they wish to participate or contribute. For a start we need, for instance, to establish every black concentration camp site's exact location, as well as the details of who were kept there, who died and who survived, what circumstances were like in the specific camps, the stories originating from them, if possible photographs of them and the surroundings etc., as very little is known about this facet of the war.

We are also looking for names to build the relevant genealogy links, not only of those who perished there, but also those who lived through it. This will later on be integrated into the App and the treasure hunt to ensure their legacy lives on and to make it interesting for those who will be visiting these sites in future. Starting with the concentration camps, the project will be extended to the battlefields and most important cultural sites across the country. The focus will be on what happened where, why and how and, most importantly, what we can learn from this.

### **Conclusion**

The SADFA *Heritage connection - Enrich your future project* is a unique project that will take some more years to complete. It will provide young South Africans and other local and international tourists with a practical and very realistic, virtual and physical experience of the many events that formed the country we have today. South Africa's history and the lessons that can be learnt from it should inspire all to serve the youth in the technology they currently know best, namely cellular phones and tablets. The SADFA project creates a unique and exciting way to entice young learners (and not only of History) to visit historical sites, and to experience the past more vividly and realistically than ever before. In the same process the SADFA wants to create job opportunities and sustain entrepreneurial initiatives to ensure purpose and pride. Calls for active support and participation are made.

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## MILITARY VETERANS RECONCILIATION PROJECT 2016/17

### CONCENTRATION CAMP TOURS 1-16 DECEMBER 2016

**5 Heritage Treasure Hunting Example:**

Remember dad/mom must take you to visit 3 sites this holiday!

Drive

Scan QR Codes and follow the clues provided

Use GPS

Find GeoCash

Unique stamp in Heritage Atlas Share with friends!

**1 What?**  
Using treasure hunting and new technology to bring our children and their parents to visit, enjoy, understand and appreciate our joint, diverse history, cultures and traditions by creating edutainment opportunities at each site, based on our school syllabus, creating "learning bridges" between our classrooms and the places where our country was formed.

**2 Aim?**  
To show our people the benefits of preserving our past, learn the lessons from it, building our future and creating employment opportunities to ensure long term sustainability and viable economic upliftment.

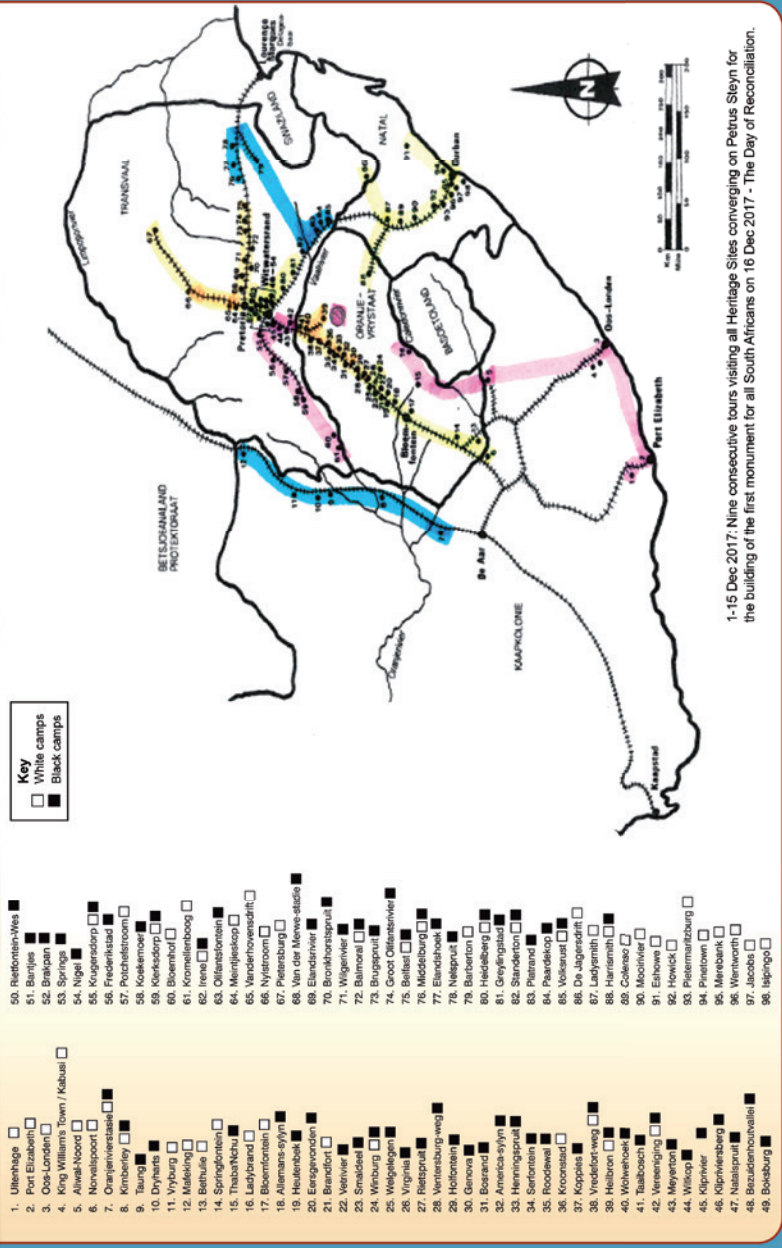
**3 Why?**  
To commemorate, give recognition and to re-conciliate – jointly turning our "swords into ploughshares".

**4 Vision?**  
Vision 2030 is a transformed South Africa with work and good living conditions for everyone, living in the real spirit of Ubuntu.

Source: Brochure design by the author



Proposed Tour Routes to the Concentration Camp Heritage Sites of the Anglo-Boer/South African War 1899-1902



1-15 Dec 2017: Nine consecutive tours visiting all Heritage Sites converging on Petrus Steyn for the building of the first monument for all South Africans on 16 Dec 2017 - The Day of Reconciliation.

Source: Kessler, 2012:12.