

Fossil Footprints

Fraserburg and its surrounding area have gained global recognition for their remarkable ancient fossil finds.

Approximately 255 million years ago, the Karoo basin was home to the ancestors of mammals. These creatures, predating the dinosaurs, bore a striking resemblance to today's larger reptiles such as crocodiles, snakes, and lizards, yet they are more closely linked to modern mammals. Unfortunately, many of these early mammal ancestors perished during the Permian Mass Extinction, the most significant extinction event in history.

Similar to modern animals gathering around a watering hole, these ancient creatures left their footprints in the primordial mud. While most of these imprints are typically erased by rivers and weather over time, under exceptional circumstances, they can be preserved for discovery and appreciation.

In 1968, Nick van Gass, a local farmer near Fraserburg, stumbled upon a stunningly preserved ancient muddy watering hole after a flash flood washed away part of his land. The rock formations appeared as if they were laid down just yesterday, with every ripple, mud crack, and small stream intricately preserved. Within these rocks, approximately 300 vertebrate footprints, invertebrate trackways, and other trace fossils were discovered, offering insights into a thriving ancient ecosystem. These trace fossils provide valuable information about the behavior and interactions of these ancient creatures, surpassing what fossilized bones alone could reveal.



Calf-sized ancient Rhachiocephalus fossil on display at the Old Parsonage Museum

GARSFONTEIN PALAEO SURFACE SITE

Gansfontein Farm, 5km from town on the R353

In 1968, a neighboring farm yielded an extraordinary find: exceptionally preserved fossilized footprints dating back 250 million years to the Permian Period. Among them, the Bradysaurus footprint stands out for its remarkable preservation. Since this discovery, the area has revealed numerous fossils of pre-dinosaur creatures such as Pareiasaurs, Dinocephalians, and Therapsids, solidifying its status as one of South Africa's foremost paleontological sites.

These fossils encompass vertebrate footprints, invertebrate trackways, and other trace fossils, collectively offering one of the world's most comprehensive evolutionary records. They trace the development from ancient reptiles to early mammals. These footprints were imprinted in ancient water pools that gradually solidified into stone over millions of years, preserving the tracks for posterity.

To embark on this remarkable journey through time, arrange a visit to the Gansfontein paleosurface via the museum. Prepare to be transported back in time as you embark on a breathtaking stroll amidst the footprints of these magnificent ancient creatures.



Fraserburg

The San people, whose artifacts and rock paintings endure to this day, were the earliest known inhabitants of the area. In 1759, the Trekboers, the first Europeans, arrived, followed by Willem Steenkamp, the first recorded settler, after whom the Steenkampsberg is named.

Fraserburg traces its origins to 1851 when it was founded on the farm Rietfontein, named after Scottish immigrant Reverend Colin Fraser and church elder Meyburg. It attained municipal status on June 6, 1862. The establishment of a post office in 1858 marked the beginning of a period of growth, culminating in the founding of a magistrate's office in 1859, a police station in 1860, and the arrival of the town's first medical doctor. A prison, operational until its closure in 1968, opened in 1861.

In 1870, H. W. A. Cooper, a notable Afrikaans author and attorney, relocated to Fraserburg. Writing under the pseudonym Samuel Zwaartman, he contributed to the local newspaper Het Volksblad with his "Boerebrieven."

Situated at an altitude of 1,385 meters on the Karoo plateau, Fraserburg shares similarities with nearby Sutherland, boasting an arid climate and remote location that offer some of the clearest and darkest night skies worldwide.



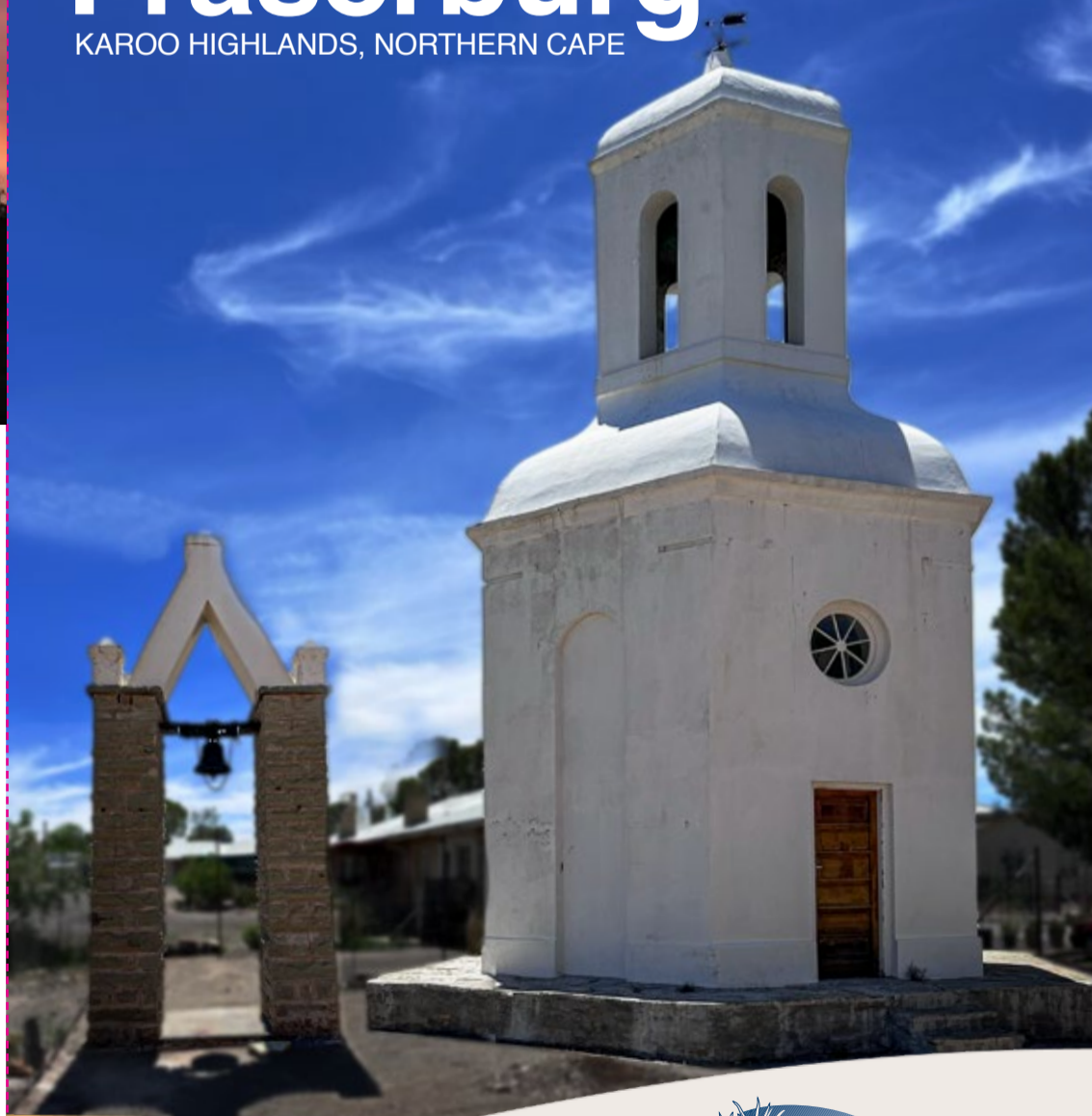
ABOVE A restored ox-wagon at the museum

BELOW Panoramic view of the Nuweveld Mountains as seen from the Theekloof Pass along the R353, the primary gateway to Fraserburg from the N1 highway.



Tourist & Walking Trail Map of Fraserburg

KAROO HIGHLANDS, NORTHERN CAPE



Fraserburg

is a town within the Karoo Hoogland (Highlands) Municipality, which is a local municipality within the Namakwa District Municipality, in the Northern Cape province of South Africa.

The municipality incorporates the towns of Williston, Fraserburg and Sutherland.

The three towns are each separated by approximately 100 km of road which, in the past, was a day's ride on an ox-wagon.

Indulge in the rich, uniquely Karoo cultural heritage of Fraserburg with a leisurely stroll through its streets.

TOURIST INFORMATION Karoo Hoogland Tourism Tel 053 285 0998

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1 OLD PARSONAGE MUSEUM
Voortrekker Street

Built in 1856 for the Rev CA Bamberger, the first minister to the newly established congregation, at a cost of £1 100. It has a unique floor plan as four of the interior walls are curved. The building contract specified that 100 planks of yellowwood should be used. Presently the building houses a museum collection, an exhibition of fossils and is also a tourist information centre.



2 CITY HALL & MUNICIPALITY
Voortrekker Street 29.

The shop of Mr Weinrichen and lodging rooms were located here, before the City Hall was built in 1927. It was rebuilt in 1958 for the sum of R40 000.



18 CHURCH STREET BARRACKS

Kerk Street
After the area was proclaimed in 1914, the barracks were built by Mor John Pienaar.

3 CORBELLED HOUSE

Voortrekker Street
An example of a Corbelled house. These were built by the trekboere (dispersed ranchers) who migrated from the south into the Karoo in the early 1800's, to discover that trees were sparse and rocks aplenty. Consequently, they set about building shelter with the available raw materials.



THE PEPPERPOT

Meyburg Street
The six-sided structure, unique in South Africa, has become the symbol of Fraserburg. It was built by Adam Jacobs in 1861. The bell was rung whenever fire broke out, as well as an evening curfew rung at nine pm when all blacks were expected to be out of the town. Even after the curfew was no longer required, the bell continued to be rung at this time until the 1950s.



MAGISTRATES BUILDING

Voortrekker Street
The stone Public Office was designed in 1912 by government architect, Percy James Eagle. The building consisted of offices, a records office with concrete roof and a court.

SANDSTONE BUILDING

26 Voortrekker Street
Standard Bank commissioned the building in 1923 at an all-inclusive cost of €3,036. The owners were very pleased with the beautiful sandstone building and boasted a lot about their imposing front door "and is easily the most impressive of all the business in the village" It presently house the SASA offices.



THRESHING FIELD

Kerk Street
Remnants of old threshing floor or *Trap Vloer* in Afrikaans where wheat was 'threshed' to separate the grain from the chaff



19 POWDER HOUSE

West of town
Built by John Findlay in 1870 as a storage place for ammunition in case a war against the Korannas, led by Kupido Pofadder and Klaas Springbok, should break out. The roof is vaulted, which minimizes the risk of fire. Also used by British troops during the Anglo-Boer era.

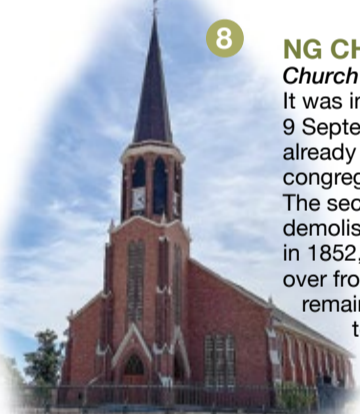
KAROO ARCHITECTURE

Rossouw Street
Rossouw Street showcases Karoo architecture, dating back to the mid-1700s. Originally constructed with local materials, including mud roofs, they later adopted corrugated iron for its durability and portability from 1860 onwards.



8 NG CHURCH

Church Street
It was inaugurated on the weekend of 8 and 9 September 1956 and upon completion was already the third church building in the congregation's 105-year existence. The second church, completed in 1868, was demolished in 1955 and the first, completed in 1852, in 1966. The trellis, brought over from Scotland in 1892 for £1,320, remains unchanged to this day.



OLD POWER STATION

2 Voortrekker Street
The town obtained its first direct current on 16 September 1938. During September 1956 this was converted to alternating current, and on 24 June 1983 Fraserburg received its first Eskom power. Seven Lister Blackstone engines may still be seen.



OLD JAIL

Rowan Street
The prison was established in 1861, and it ceased operations 107 years later in 1968.

DYASON CEMETERY

Dyason Street
Named for a former mayor, showcases local history with unique headstones crafted by locals under Scottish stone mason James Wright's guidance. It also holds graves of British soldiers from the Anglo-Boer/ South African War.



RIETFONTEIN HOMESTEADS

Fountain Street
In 1851 the farm Rietfontein, on which the town of Fraserburg was laid out, was purchased by the Dutch Reformed Church from Albertus Abraham Visser, on the condition that this dwelling house and horse mill would remain his property for a number of years. Possibly the oldest house in the town, but has been rebuilt many times since then and a precise dating is no longer possible. On 1 January 1934, the Church Council leased the farm on which the town and commonwealth were situated to the town council for 99 years, at the sum of £40 per year. On 25 May 1959 the interim Council agreed to purchase the aforementioned from the Church Council for £11,000.



ORIGINAL FOUNTAIN

Fountain Street
Opposite Rietfontein Homestead, there's a large reed bed. Fraserburg's central area was once a vast vlei with tall reeds. A hidden fountain within the remaining reeds served as the town's original water source.



13 HOMESTEAD

Fraser Street
Small, simple triangular typical Karoo house with Van Schalkwyk gables



FORMER MISSIONARY CHURCH

Voortrekker Street
The cornerstone was laid in 1920. During the 1950s, the floors were still regularly smeared with manure. After that, a plank floor was put in. On 15 August 1969, the Mission congregation was forced, amid great protest, to hand it over to the Community Development Council for sale for R18 860.



FORMER MISSION CHURCH

Voortrekker Street
In 1884, the Missionary Congregation with 22 members was separated from the Dutch Reformed Congregations. On July 6, 1896, the cornerstone was laid. The parishioners themselves shaped the clay bricks from which the inner walls were built. The total building cost was R468.

