

Gold mining in Zululand¹

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Samevatting

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die reeks kleiner “goudstormlope” wat gedurende die middel 1880’s plaasgevind het tot net na die Eerste Wêreldoorlog in Kwa-Zulu-Natal – histories bekend as Zululand. Goudprospektering was veral aangespoor deur die £1 000 beloning aangebied deur die koloniale regering van Natal aan enige delwer wat ‘n betekenisvolle goudrif in hierdie geweste sou ontdek. Alhoewel betreklike ryk ertsneerslae van gouddraende riwwe dikwels ontdek is, en wat gevolglik tot stormlope na vergeleë areas in hierdie gebied aanleiding gegee het, het almal op die lange duur min opgelewer. Die eenvoudige verklaring daarvoor was dat die Goudrif net in ertsneste of -holtes voorgekom het en dus nie aaneenlopend was nie. Die bergagtige aard van die terrein met sy diep valleie was grotendeels die vernaamste rede die gebroke goudriflyne. Twee fases van goudmynbedrywighede is geïdentifiseer. Uiteindelik sou dit blyk dat die meeste van die goudmynmaatskappye in Zululand ‘n beperkte groei gehandhaaf het as kleinerige myne met ‘n gesukkel om ‘n bestaan te maak. Bedrywighede is beëindig. Die uitsondering was ‘n kleinerige aanleg in die Pongolovallei wat die Wonderfonteinriwwe bewerk het. Na die Tweede Wêreldoorlog was daar net sporadiese pogings om bestaande goudriwwe te myn aangesien daar geen nuwes ontdek was nie. In hierdie artikel word die begin- en ontwikkelingsfase van die hoofgoudstormlope in Zululand ondersoek. Die lengte van elk se lewensiklus sowel as die gesukkel om die “ertsneste” te vind en ‘n befondsing vir dié bedryf se velerlei uitdagings, word bespreek.

Introduction

The finding of payable amounts of gold in the area of Natal had been one of the motivations behind the arrival of white traders at Port Natal (Durban) in 1824. But the eventual discovery of any gold was delayed for many years even

¹ This article was presented in a shortened version to the ‘*Natal and Zululand in the Colonial and Pre-colonial periods*’ History Workshop held at Natal University, Pietermaritzburg, 23 October 1990.

though there were persistent rumours of its existence in Zululand,² especially in the Nhlazatshe area. Prior to the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 mineral prospectors had been refused entry into Zululand although a number of them had penetrated the region in the guise of hunters and traders, but with no luck. After the restoration of Cetshwayo and the partition of Zululand in 1883, a British Reserve Territory consisting of the districts of Eshowe, Nkandla and Nqutu was set up. With the formation of the New Republic (incorporating the present-day districts of Vryheid, Babanango, Paulpietersburg and Ngotshshe) in August 1884 and its incorporation in 1886 into the South African Republic (Transvaal), and the British annexation of the remainder of Zululand in 1887, the obstacles to prospecting in Zululand were largely removed. However, until the opening up of Zululand to white settlers by the Zululand Land Delimitation Commission in 1905 no whites, except those farmers in Proviso B (the area around present-day Melmoth cut off from the New Republic in 1886 by the boundary commission) and government officials in Eshowe, were allowed title to land in Zululand. Miners and prospectors were only granted occupation rights in an area declared as a mining area and could not obtain permanent land title.

The early prospectors in Zululand came from all walks of life and for minimal investment almost anybody could take up prospecting. All a prospector needed in the line of equipment was a blowpipe and candle for testing minerals, a knife or small file to test for the hardness of ores, a prospector's hammer, various chisels to extract the ore samples and a pocket lens to examine more closely the mineral traces (if any) in these ore samples. If he desired to do some blasting he would need extra hammers, drills, blasting cartridges and slow fuses. But most of the early intrepid gold diggers of Zululand merely dug and washed alluvial soil for gold dust and nuggets.

From the mid-1880s onwards, such is the geological nature of the Zululand region of present-day KwaZulu-Natal, rich pockets of gold (and other minerals and metals) were constantly being discovered. At regular intervals various 'gold strikes' would spark off great excitement and lead to a gold rush, which usually turned out to be short-lived. Many of these finds held out great promise only to dash the hopes of the discoverers. The first of these Zululand gold rushes³ took place in 1886.

2 The historical term 'Zululand' is here being used to denote that area of present-day KwaZulu-Natal lying north of the Tugela, south of the Pongolo and east of the Buffalo rivers.

3 There were other 'gold rushes' in other areas of present-day KwaZulu-Natal during the 1880s and later, most notably on the south coast and in the Umvoti district.

Goldrush to Mfongosi

In July 1886 Fred Markham had panned gold at Mfongosi - *the river of rushing noises* - a remote tributary of the Tugela River in the Nkandla district. Already on 4 August 1886 the Greytown Syndicate had requested permission to erect a battery on the south-east bank of the Mfongosi River. Within a few months of the discovery a mining camp had been established, consisting of residences of every description from ragged patrol tents to sod built shanties. Optimism was such that a regular Diggers' Committee of fifteen members with A.H. Manning as secretary was elected on 25 October 1886, while from the beginning of November 1886 a weekly mail service was instituted from Greytown to the Mfongosi goldfields.⁴

This rush had occurred despite a disappointing report released on 30 August 1886 by W.H. Evans of Durban detailing the results of assays he had done on quartz from the main Mfongosi reef, the so-called Markham Reef, and the Ballarat Extension of this reef. After a time, fresh discoveries in the area were made, more mining syndicates were formed and the digger population continued to increase. These mining syndicates were usually formed by groups of individuals from various towns in the Colony of Natal such as Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Greytown and Vryheid in the South African Republic (ZAR), who agreed to pay £2 or £3 cash per month for up to a year. The syndicates would then send along a member who would select a prospector to peg out claims, engage black labourers and supply the prospector with tools and perhaps an assistant. Over a period of time some 2 000 claims (45 x 90 metres) were registered in the Mfongosi area, for which a prospecting licence of ten shillings per month was paid to the Natal Colonial Government (and interestingly not to the Zululand Administration, i.e. the magistrates (or colonial commissioners) at either Eshowe or Nkandla but to the 'nearest' magistrate to the Mfongosi goldfields at Greytown). Prospectors also had to furnish this nearest resident magistrate's office with a sketch plan giving the locality and size of the claim before it could be registered. As this first Zululand gold

⁴ Natal Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg (NAD), Zululand Government House (ZGH), Zululand correspondence (ZA), ZGH 699: ZA 230/1889, 4 August 1886; ZA 280/1886, 13 September 1886; ZGH 697, ZA 50/1886, 2 December 1886; TV Bulpin, *Shaka's country: A book of Zululand*, (Cape Town; Timmins, 1952), p.216.

rush gained momentum the buildings at Mfongosi were improved both in structure and appearance, until in 1887 the camp became a village.⁵

In March 1887 A. Muirhead, in addition to discharging his duties as clerk to the sub-commissioner of Nkandla, was officially appointed as mining inspector for the Mfongosi goldfields (he had been acting inspector since 9 August 1886). By this time there were apparently about 400 people in the Nkandla district permanently engaged in seeking and mining gold. Of this number about 50 were working a small discovery on the Vungwini stream, and a similar number at Mangweni, near the junction of the Buffalo River with the Tugela. The rest of the prospectors and miners in the district were more or less concentrated on the Mfongosi River close to its junction with the Tugela River.⁶

After a time when a number of reefs had been developed it was decided to erect a central crushing mill or battery to enable the various property owners to test their reefs. However, as soon as the order for the battery was placed a number of syndicates withdrew their prospectors, stopping all development work so as to wait until their reefs were tested, planning to sell them at a great profit. Eventually the battery was erected and announced ready to start crushing the quartz from one of the best reefs at Mfongosi. After considerable crushing the official known as the amalgamator was ready to scrape off the gold from the plates. On the day this took place a large expectant crowd waited outside the battery manager's office. But after a considerable wait first the amalgamator came out and hurried off and then the battery manager announced that practically no gold at all had been recovered. Almost overnight the Mfongosi goldfields were abandoned. By November 1887 all work had practically ceased, while Muirhead's services as mining inspector were dispensed with in February 1888.⁷ And so ended the first major goldrush in Zululand. The mining inspector, Muirhead, identified the main reasons for the failure of the Mfongosi goldfields as:

the introduction of inferior machinery which does not allow of the gold being caught on the plates, and thereby misleading to the prospector and the general public, as to the richness of the quartz. The indiscriminate way in which claims were pegged out... by inexperienced prospectors which not only caused loss of money to their principals, but has raised suspicion in the mind

5 NAD, ZA 236/1886, 5 August 1886, ZA 268/1886, 30 August 1886; ZGH 703: ZA 120/1887, 29 March 1887; *Zululand Times*, 28 March 1907; TV Bulpin, *Shaka's country*, pp.218-219.

6 NAD, ZGH 703: ZA 119/1887, 28 March 1887; ZA 122/1887, 30/1887.

7 NAD, ZGH 709: Z 92/1888, 10 February 1888; *Zululand Times*, 28 March 1907.

of the general public as to the genuineness of these fields [and] the reluctance of capitalists to invest money in developing property known to be auriferous owing to the seemingly insufficient protection they can obtain over property.⁸

Muirhead was also convinced:

from the really splendid pan prospects, and quartz specimens, which are shewn to me from time to time, that had a good mill, under able management, been started, these fields would ere this have been proved payable.⁹

There was definitely gold at Mfongosi but in small quantities and so refractory that no known method would extract it from the quartz. Some small concerns did, however, continue mining the odd pocket of gold in the area for many years thereafter.

Other goldrushes in Zululand

The excitement of the Mfongosi goldfields had attracted many prospectors to Zululand. The failure of these goldfields did not deter some of them to any great extent and prospecting merely shifted to other areas in Zululand. In the middle of 1887 one of these roving prospectors, C. Tatham, claimed to have found gold at Msinga, and the Golden Eagle Mining Company was formed to work it, but with little success. In the Nkandla district a prospector named Staniland made a strike on the Nsuzi stream - another tributary of the Tugela River - which flows through the Nkandla forest. Another rush took place to this spot and to a tributary stream of the Nsuzi River, the Nkunzana. On 27 March 1890 the chief commissioner and resident magistrate of Zululand, Melmoth Osborn, ceremonially opened a battery for the so-called Lower Nsuzi (Nsuzi) Goldfields. This place became the centre of prospecting activity for the Tugela Valley but had as little luck as Mfongosi. By March 1891 the Staniland mine was in liquidation. Albert Bremer took it over for a while and was able to make a small profit i.e. a certain amount of gold was in fact extracted, but he eventually abandoned his claim at the end of 1896.

A further reef was discovered by J.G. Household (Household) at Ngobevu at the junction of the Buffalo and Tugela rivers. He had been able to work a patchy reef called the Golden Dove from which he was also able to make

8 For both quotations see NAD, ZGH 707: Z 221/1887, 24 September 1887.

9 TV Bulpin, *Shaka's country*, p.220.

a small profit. Between 30 June 1891 and 30 June 1892 he recovered 39,5 ounces of gold from the crushing of 34 tons of ore.¹⁰

In 1894 J.F. Muller had also discovered a reputedly rich reef on the upper Nsuzi River at Ntingwe (south of Dickson's Store). Other finds were also made on two of the Nsuzi River's tributaries, the Vutyini and Elibomvu. Together these became known as the Upper Nsuzi Valley Goldfields. However, these finds were in an almost inaccessible area. Muller negotiated with H. Eckstein & Co. of Johannesburg, for their help in opening up the find. This company sent a representative, a Mr Mackay, who set himself up in a tent near the Nsuzi Store owned by Fry & Oxborrow. Here Mackay interviewed relays of prospectors and tested their samples, drawing up agreements with most of them. Mackay then conveyed approximately 600 sugar pockets of ore samples to Johannesburg for testing while work on developing the Nsuzi reef was carried on for a number of months. But Eckstein's abruptly shut down the workings and abandoned all operations. No explanation for these actions was ever given and the results of the ore testing were also never published. Eventually towards the end of 1905 a Durban syndicate, the Natal Proprietary Mines, Ltd, took over the Eckstein claims but relinquished them again at the end of 1906.¹¹

The Nondweni goldfields

One of the more promising finds of 1887 was that in the Nqutu district at Nondweni. By February 1888 numerous claims had already been pegged in the area. On 25 April 1888 the Isandhlwana Gold Mining Syndicate had applied for permission to erect a mill at Umhlungaana on the Nondweni River (a tributary of the White Umfolozi River) to crush quartz. This request was turned down pending the formal declaration of a goldfield in the area. A number of reefs were discovered along the Nondweni River - the Enterprise Reef being the first, followed by the Dew Drop Reef (May 1888) and the 'Nick of time' Reef in November 1888. By October 1888 there was already a provisional Diggers' Committee, which was formally launched on 17 December 1888 with Duncan Hedley as chairman. The committee was given

10 NAD, Natal Colonial Publications (NCP) 8/1/6/5/1 Report of the commissioner of mines for the year ending 30 June 1892: p. 8; NCP 8/1/6/6/1 Report on the mineral resources of Zululand, 1894, p. 20-21; 8/1/6/6/3 Report on the mining industry of Zululand for the year 1897, p.15.

11 *Zululand Times*, 29 March 1928; NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/10 Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1906, pp.8, 32.

the power to investigate water rights applications and to register these upon approval by the local Zululand magistrate at Nqutu). Water had become increasingly important for the development of the many claims that had sprung up in the area. There was also a brisk trade in claims and numerous amalgamations or takeovers occurred.¹²

Between 1889 and 1892 there was a lull on the Nondweni goldfields with no-one willing to take the risk of erecting a battery for the crushing of ore. However, some of the syndicates were able to crush ore using primitive winches to bring the quartz to the surface, breaking it up into smaller more manageable pieces by hammer, and then washing it in a contraption called a 'dolly' which was a contrivance turned on a vertical axis by a handle or winch to give a circular motion to the ore being washed. For 1890 and 1891 the Sisters Co. (formerly the Three Sisters and the biggest syndicate with 36 claims) paid a total of £7 17s 9d in royalties on 105 ounces of gold. (Royalties at a rate of 1s. 6d. per ounce of gold had to be paid on all gold mined in Zululand and the Natal Colony).¹³ From the beginning of 1892 there was renewed development of the Nondweni claims. The De Waal Gold Mining Syndicate of Vryheid engaged N.M. Howith, a gold expert and miner, to develop their two properties, the Prince Imperial and Piet's Luck, with a view to launching a share flotation. According to the magistrate of Nqutu 'both properties [are] said to be rich, 10 lbs. of quartz taken from them was analysed at Johannesburg at the rate of 136 oz a ton.'¹⁴

This favourable report led to many of the areas that had been abandoned being repegged or old registered companies or syndicates being taken over (shares bought out by new investors). Those syndicates that could afford it continued with development work. During 1892 the Sisters Co. continued to develop their property and were able to crush sufficient to pay current expenses. (From a crushing of 265 tons the company had extracted 389 ounces of gold.) This company was also refloated (raised additional finance through the selling of new shares) in Pietermaritzburg. By the end of November 1892 the Sisters Co. had sunk a shaft approximately 25 metres down with a cross-cut of another 25 metres following the quartz vein. But at this stage the rich

12 NAD, Magisterial records of the Nqutu district (1/NQU) 3/3/1 Nqutu, Minute papers, 1887-1888: 57/1888, 25 April 1888, 30 May 1888, 5 October 1888, 24 December 1888; NCP 8/1/6/6/1 Report on the mineral resources of Zululand, 1894, p.5, 8.

13 NAD, 3/1/1 Nqutu, Letter book, 1892-1894: Resident magistrate's report, 10-30 May 1892, pp.46-47; 3/3/4 Nqutu, Minute papers, 1892, 4 February 1892.

14 NAD, 3/1/1 Resident magistrate's report, 10-30 May 1892, pp.46-47; 275/1892, 17 July 1892, p.118.

leader which had been paying their expenses had been worked out to the boundary of an adjoining property and the syndicate owners were unwilling to spend more money developing it further. Instead they hired it out to the former manager, J. Robinson, on a tributary basis. Robinson had informed the magistrate that he was optimistic of making a success since 'the main reef has not yet been struck'.¹⁵

On the Enterprise claim four shafts had been sunk while from a crushing of 21 tons the syndicate obtained fourteen ounces of gold. On the basis of this result they decided to erect a ten-stamp battery on their property. By December 1892 shafts had been sunk on a number of other syndicates' claims with visible showings of gold being found on the Myrtle, Hazelnut, Balfour (formerly Brothers), and Prince Imperial properties. Besides these main claims being worked by syndicates a number of individual prospectors were working small individual claims (mainly surface reefs or outcroppings).¹⁶

With the increased activity the magistrate had to deal with a number of cases of repegging of claims on the grounds that the claims were not being worked legally or had been abandoned. But in some cases this led to litigation before the magistrate who had then to arbitrate on the merits of any particular claim.¹⁷

Outside interest was further sparked by the De Waal Syndicate's claim to the reward for discovering payable gold in Natal and Zululand (as set out in Proclamation II of 1889). The magistrate duly awarded them four free claims.¹⁸ Several agents and representatives of mining companies from Johannesburg visited the fields with a view to taking over certain of the claims for further development. According to the magistrate 'these agents and representatives appear satisfied with the yields.'¹⁹

By the end of February 1893 there were 64 areas registered at Nondweni and three influential syndicates had been formed for the development of fifteen of them. Thirty gold-bearing quartz reefs and 'leaders' running more or less parallel to one another had also been discovered. The area of development was a strip of land along the Nondweni River five kilometres long and only 1,2 kilometres wide. A ten stamp battery was in the process of being erected

15 NAD, 3/1/1 Resident magistrate's report, p.396, 8 December 1892.

16 NAD, 3/3/5 Nqutu, Minute papers, 1893: NQ 84/1893, 23 February 1893.

17 NAD, 3/1/2 Nqutu, Letter book, 1894-1895: 60/1894, 16 February 1894.

18 NAD, 3/1/1 Resident magistrate's report, 286/1892, 7 August 1892, pp.139-140.

19 NAD, 3/1/1 Resident magistrate's report, 98/1893, 31 March 1893, p.524.

on the property of the Enterprise Syndicate and in the words of the resident magistrate: 'from information gleaned from people and my own personal observations there seems to be every probability of the Nondweni Gold Fields proving a success.'²⁰

In November 1893 the ten stamp battery began operating and after nineteen days of crushing 134 ounces and ten pennyweight (dwt.) of gold was extracted from 116 tons of quartz (an average of one ounce three pennyweight four grains to the ton). A 27-metre long shaft with a drive of 23 metres was sunk on the reef of the most promising of the claims, the Enterprise, which was found to be:

six feet wide and pronounced to be permanent being well defined and cased in a solid formation and as yet has given no sign of pinching out [but] to work the property further development is required which seems beyond the power of the present owners for want of capital.²¹

The output of gold for December 1893 from the Enterprise mine was 134 ounces five pennyweight, 74 ounces for January 1894, 40 ounces for February and only 27 ounces five pennyweight for March, making a total of 275 ounces ten pennyweight on which royalties of £20 13s. 3d. were paid. (Production from the Enterprise mine between December 1893 and December 1894 was 520,25 ounces extracted from 1 322,5 tons crushed. Gross proceeds from the sale of this gold was £1 757 17s. 4d (a not inconsiderable sum for those times). Up to April 1895 the Enterprise mine produced another 157,75 ounces from 1 656 tons crushed.) The apparent success of the Enterprise mine led other hopeful prospectors to peg off claims on what was called the Enterprise Extension (a three kilometre-long extension of the prospecting area) in the hopes of catching the Enterprise Reef. Two other large reefs were found on the Sisters and Bull's Luck properties which were reputed to be payable. Quartz showing visible gold had also been found on the De Waal Syndicate claim. This expansion not only in actual mining but also in prospecting activity and pegging of claims was reflected in the registering of one hundred and fifty-seven prospecting areas at Nondweni for 1893 and by the end of February 1894 there were twelve syndicates comprising of members from not only Zululand and the Colony of Natal, but afar afield as the Orange Free State

20 NAD, 3/1/1 Resident magistrate's report, 80/1893, 10 March 1893, p.495.

21 NAD, 3/1/2 Nqutu, Letter book, 1894-1895,106/1894, 28 February 1894, p.63. Pennyweight (dwt.) is a unit of weight equal to 24 grains or one-twentieth of a troy ounce (fine). Difference between fine ounces (troy) and ounces (avoirdupois) - the former is one-twelfth of a pound and the latter one-sixteenth. One metric kilogram equals to 2,2 imperial pounds (lb).

Republic (OFS) and the South African Republic operating on the Nondweni goldfields (by the end of 1894 the number of syndicates operating had increased to 21 in addition to one limited company). In April 1894 two of the syndicates were floated, viz. The Sisters Co. with a capital of £13 000 and The Happy Thought Co. for £10 000, in an effort to obtain finance for further development of the mining prospects on the Nondweni Goldfields.²²

The community had grown to more than 100 permanent residents and a passenger cart service between Nondweni and Dundee had been started by a Mr Havermann. The community was also showing all the usual symptoms of growing pains. In August 1894 the resident magistrate at Nqutu had requested the authorities to appoint a white constable at Nondweni to counter the rising tide of crime. Burglaries, theft, attempted robberies etc. were taking place almost daily. The magistrate had also recommended the withdrawal of the liquor licence granted to the proprietor of the Nondweni Central Hotel, L.W. Mercer. There had apparently been a significant increase in drunkenness and brawling since the arrival of a number of men expelled from the Denny-Dalton goldfields in the South African Republic. The governor of Natal had also visited Nondweni in August 1894. He was entertained to lunch by the Prospector's Association, which also presented him with a petition requesting a daily postal service, the establishment of a branch court and a money-order office at Nondweni, and the appointment of a justice of the peace and a district surgeon. Obviously the residents of Nondweni were optimistic and had great faith in the future prospects of the Nondweni goldfields. The first white constable, H.A. Elliot, was eventually appointed on 5 January 1895. In June 1896 the Nondweni Tennis Club had even applied for a piece of land near 'the existing cricket ground on Victoria Square.'²³

The growth in the population of the area had necessitated the formal proclamation of a gold mining area of approximately 6 000 hectares from which all the local Zulu tribesmen were removed. The township of Nondweni was also proclaimed in which only whites were allowed to buy plots. On 10 August 1896 eighteen residential erven of one acre each and 22 business erven

22 NAD, 3/1/2 Nqutu, Letter book, 1894-1895, 106/1894, 28 February 1894, pp.64-65, 154/1894, 24 April 1894, p.169, 164/1894, 20 April 1894, p.182; NCP 8/1/6/6/1, Report on the mineral resources of Zululand, 1894: p.5-6; NCP 8/1/6/6/2, Report of the mining industry for the year 1895, p.9.

23 NAD, 1/NQU 3/1/2 Nqutu, Letter book, 1894-1895, 106/1894, 28 February 1894, p.65, 282/1894, 23 August 1894, p.408, 428; 3/3/7 Nqutu, Minute papers, 1895: NQ 15/1895, 5 January 1895; 3/3/8 Nqutu, Minute papers, 1896; NQ 400/1896, 22 June 1896.

of a third of an acre were advertised for sale at £20 each. Soon a little town emerged and even a school for white children was started during 1896.²⁴

But this optimism was to prove short-lived. The Enterprise Mine had been taken over in April 1895 by a new syndicate, The Durban Enterprise Gold Mining Co. Ltd with a share capital of £125 000 of which £25 000 was working capital and £15 000 reserve. Initially they had considerable success and up to the end of September 1896 they had produced 1 454 ounces of gold from a crushing of 9 664 tons. Their gross proceeds were £4 862 6s. 9d.²⁵ But the signs of collapse were much in evidence. In September 1896 the resident magistrate reported that:

the unsatisfactory result of the Enterprise crushing has had a depressing effect on the [gold] fields. A number of the syndicates ... granted protection over their properties... they have reduced their staff and are carrying work on a lesser scale.²⁶

In November 1896 the managers of the New Sisters (launched in 1895 with a capital of £85 000 to take over the Sisters Gold Mining Co.) and Enterprise mines left Nondweni while the caretaker of the Enterprise mine was instructed to dispose of the property and all the machinery. By mid-December 1896 the magistrate had reported that 'the mining community and other residents of Nondweni have left in such large numbers of late...' that most mining activity had come to a standstill.²⁷ It was only after the end of the Second Anglo-Boer war in 1902 that mining activity on any scale resumed at Nondweni.

Gold in the Mthonjaneni district

The other area of gold mining activity during the 1890s was in the Proviso B area of the Mthonjaneni (Entonjaneni) district (present-day Melmoth area). In 1887 two townships had been proclaimed in the area. The one named Osborn had been surveyed and laid out by M.A.S. Kritzinger on his farm *Protest*. As an inducement to prospective buyers Kritzinger had inserted in his advertisement for the sale of plots in the new township of Osborn that:

24 W van der Merwe, "Die vestiging van Blankes in Zoeloeland vanaf 1897 tot 1936", *Archives Yearbook for South African History*, 47 (1) (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1984), p.13.

25 NAD, 1/NQU 3/1/3, Nqutu, Letter book 1895-1896: Annual report on the Nondweni Gold Fields by the deputy Commissioner of Mines - Nqutu district for 1896, January 1897, p.519.

26 NAD, 1/NQU 3/1/4, Nqutu, Letter book, 1896-1897: Resident magistrate's report, September 1896, p.12.

27 NAD, 1/NQU 3/1/4, Nqutu, Letter book, 1896-1897: Resident magistrate's report, November 1896, p.133; Letter, 21 December 1896, p.174; NCP 8/1/6/6/2, Report on the mining industry for the year 1895, p.12.

‘Gold, both reef and alluvial, has been found in the immediate neighbourhood, and in the Spruit at the northern end of township gold is seen in nearly every panning.’²⁸

The rival township of Melmoth (both names of the two new townships were in honour of Melmoth Osborn – the then chief commissioner and resident magistrate of Zululand) was also surveyed and laid out in 1887 on the nearby farm of JAF Ortlepp which he had named ‘*Golden Reef*’ in the belief that the discoveries would one day rival those of the Witwatersrand. Both Ortlepp and Kritzinger had laid out their towns on the basis of showings of gold-bearing reefs on their two farms, *Golden Reef* and *Protest*, and a neighbouring farm, *Konigsberg*. To exploit these deposits the Harewood Gold Mining Syndicate was launched and signed an agreement with the owners of the farm *Konigsberg* on 14 September 1889. It began working outcrops of gold-bearing quartz on the farm *Konigsberg* (which later became the Golden Hare mine), and in December 1890 the syndicate shipped a paraffin tin filled with gold-bearing quartz to AS Guillot of the New York Stock Exchange in an effort to arouse interest in the raising of share capital. But due to the inaccessibility of the area and because the claims were in British Zululand where satisfactory titles to land were believed to be unobtainable, there was insufficient public interest to warrant a share flotation. The worldwide financial depression of the time also played a part in this lack of interest while the recent failure of the Mfongosi goldfields were still fresh in the public’s mind. There were other gold discoveries in the Melmoth district. A find, known as the ‘Bob Watkins’ reef, on an adjoining farm, *Vergelegen*, owned by the local JP, DC Uys, when assayed in 1890 gave a provisional yield of four to six ounces of gold per ton. Another find further away across the White Umfolozi River at Mabedhlana near Ulundi was reported to the Mthonjaneni magistrate by the discoverer, R.C. Hartley, on 19 August 1890. Claims were also staked out on the farm *Nineveh* on the upper reaches of the Mhlathuze (also spelt as Umhlatuzi) River.²⁹ All these finds lay idle during 1890 with most developers trying to raise finance to develop them through share flotations.

28 NAD, ZGH 708: ZA 308/1887, 28 November 1887.

29 NAD, Magisterial records of the Mthonjaneni district (1/Mel), 5/1/11 Melmoth, Correspondence and other papers, 1890-1893; PB 370/1890, 19 August 1890; 5/1/5 Melmoth, Letter book, 1890-1893, Resident magistrate’s report; PB 18/1892, 16 January 1892, pp.461-462; NCP 8/1/6/6/1, Report on the mineral resources of Zululand, 1894, pp.16, 24.

During 1891 the Harewood Syndicate proceeded to develop their claim on the farm *Konigsberg*. By December 1891 they had erected a six-stamp battery on the property and had begun crushing. From a crushing of eighteen tons they recovered 44 ounces. An additional 18 ounces were obtained from a scraping of the plates, which gave a yield of 3,4 ounces to the ton. In reporting this yield the resident magistrate, JL Knight, commented that 'this is no deception as I have seen the gold.'³⁰ He also speculated on:

whether the syndicate will be able to keep up the supply of quartz of the same quality as that which they are now milling...the principal leader varies in thickness from three or four inches to about fifteen inches...I am told [it] becomes poorer as it goes down. It has been proved to about seventy feet. It will also be difficult and expensive to work these leaders as they have no proper solid casings but a soft clayey substance without any stability and requiring a great amount of what I think they call 'timber stopping'. These last mentioned facts are unfortunate as I believe the splendid yield of the surface stuff will lead many people - probably poor people - to invest in the shares of the company only to lose their all.³¹

Unfortunately these were to prove prophetic words especially in the light of developments elsewhere in Zululand.

The Denny-Dalton goldfields

Besides the Nondweni and Melmoth goldfields prospectors had penetrated areas of the Vryheid district of the South African Republic from which encouraging reports were emanating. At the beginning of 1889 a syndicate of investors from Pietermaritzburg had been formed for the purpose of prospecting certain farms in the Vryheid district which were all near the Zululand border. This syndicate engaged a prospector who from time to time reported finding small deposits of gold. Eventually, after two years, he advised the syndicate that he had found much richer deposits in a creek on the farm *Tusschenbyde* in the valley of the White Umfolozi River about twelve kilometres south of the Nhlazatshe Mountain. In August 1891 the syndicate engaged a qualified mining engineer from Johannesburg, and after an examination of

30 NAD, 1/Mel Melmoth, Letter book, 1890-1893, Resident magistrate's report, 5/1/5; PB 18/1892, 16 January 1892, pp.455-457.

31 NAD, 1/Mel Melmoth, Letter book, 1890-1893, Resident magistrate's report, 5/1/5; PB 18/1892, 16 January 1892, pp.458-461.

the site, he submitted a very favourable report.³² In October 1892 Thomas Denny, his two sons GA and HS Denny, John Dalton and Scott Paulson appeared on the scene as members of a syndicate formed to buy up and develop mines whose ore was of a refractory nature. They claimed to have the rights to a process, patented by the Thwaite-Denny Syndicate of London, which was said to be able to extract gold from the Zululand ores. GA Denny, assisted by JT Carrick, was sent during the first half of 1893 to carry out a thorough investigation as well as numerous assays on the farm *Tusschenbyde* and other properties in the vicinity. On 3 April 1893 Denny released his findings. Denny estimated the value of the gold-bearing reef on *Tusschenbyde* at £16 516 500. The Denny-Dalton Syndicate set up their plant on the farm Malta and began operations on what became known as the Denny-Dalton Goldfields.³³ Denny's optimistic report led to another goldrush and fortune-seekers from all over streamed into the area. All hopes were centred on the patented recovery process that the Denny family had discovered and which John Dalton had financed.

Increase in the number of prospectors

After the release of Denny's report in April 1893 there was renewed activity in the Mthonjaneni district. Prospecting fever spread throughout the district and in May 1893 the Melmoth Syndicate applied for four claims at Mabedhlana in the names of HT Sutherland, RM Bell, HG Symmonds and RC Hartley, while in June 1893 the Mabedhlana Syndicate headed by Carl Bryhn was also registered. On 15 July 1893 FE Mann, AS Mann and AB Shedlock applied for claims near Nkonjeni.³⁴

At the beginning of 1894 a banket geological formation, similar to the one found at the Denny-Dalton gold field in the South African Republic, but on the surface, was found on the southern slope of the Hlopekulu Mountain in the White Umfolozi River valley.³⁵ The rush was now truly under way and prospectors flooded into the area. In the first half of June 1894, 37 prospecting licences for the Mthonjaneni district were issued. Another 40 were issued by the end of June 1894 (making a total of 111 issued since the beginning

32 *Natal Witness*, 26 April 1893; G.A. Denny, *The Denny-Dalton gold fields* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness Printers, 1893), pp.1, 6-7.

33 Denny, *Denny-Dalton gold fields*, pp.6-7; TV Bulpin, *Shaka's country*, pp.220-221.

34 NAD, 1/Mel 5/1/11, Letter, 23 May 1893; PB 267/1893, Letter, 15 July 1893.

35 NAD, 1/Mel 5/1/6, Melmoth, Letter book, 1894-1895, Letter, 30 June 1894, pp.260-261.

of 1894), while 31 prospecting areas were registered, bringing the total to 52 prospecting areas granted. By mid-July 1894 there were 130 prospecting licences in force and 91 prospecting areas registered for the Mthonjaneni district (which at the time included the present-day district of Mahlabatini, which only became a separate district in 1898). But not all these licences were being put to use. On an inspection trip the magistrate for Mthonjaneni, AJ Shepstone, found only 21 prospectors working their claims, which led him to report that all the other claims had been pegged for speculation purposes. The government then decided to enforce the provision that the licences were only valid if the claim was worked. Consequently there was a drop in the licences issued with only twenty licences and three prospecting areas being registered in the Mthonjaneni district for July. Eventually, for the whole of 1894, the magistrate of Mthonjaneni granted 183 licences, made 199 renewals and registered six licences for prospecting on the Melmoth townlands. A sum of £266 1s. 3d. was paid in licence fees for that year.³⁶

A limited amount of gold was also recovered. Up to 31 December 1893 royalties had been paid to the magistrate of Mthonjaneni on 176 ounces mined by the Harewood Gold Mining Co. on the farm Konigsberg, and 45 ounces mined by IP Jacobsz on the farm Vergelegen. In 1894 the Harewood Co. had paid royalties on another 234,25 ounces.³⁷

Disappointing crushing results

All through 1894 the Denny-Dalton Syndicate had continued developing their property. They laid out a town on their farm and took options on several other mines, while others planned on becoming tributary to them in exchange for rights to the recovery process. In December 1894 their ten-stamp battery arrived and the first big crushing was scheduled for April 1895. The results were awaited with bated breath and there even appeared to be a slight revival in the pegging of prospecting areas at Mabedhlana where it was anticipated a rush would take place in the event of a good result being obtained from this crushing. The Denny-Dalton crushing results were, however, disappointing. A second crushing in May 1895 confirmed the result and gold mining activ-

36 NAD, 1/Mel 5/1/6, Melmoth, Letter book, 1894-1895, Letter, 15 June 1894, p.248; 30 June 1894, p.260; PB 350/1894, 17 July 1894, p.277; 31 July 1894, p.296; 30 January 1895, p.492.

37 NAD, 1/Mel 5/1/6 Melmoth, Letter book, 1894-1895: Letter, 30 January 1895, p.492; 2 February 1895, p.516.

ity came to a standstill. Thomas Denny died in July 1895 (possibly from the bitter disappointment of the whole affair). His two sons attempted to retrieve something from the mess but failed.³⁸

In the Mthonjaneni district the Metropolitan Exploration Syndicate of Johannesburg eventually purchased the Harewood Co. in 1896 and had an option on the neighbouring Watkins reef property. A trial crushing of 400 tons was undertaken by the Harewood Mill while development work continued on both the neighbouring Watkins reef and Carrick Syndicate claims. But in January 1897 the Harewood Gold Mining Co. went into liquidation with the magistrate, AJ Shepstone, acting as chief liquidator. Proceedings against the company had been instituted by AR Pierson on behalf of black labourers for unpaid wages (a sum of £234 4s. 1d.).³⁹

In December 1896 and January and February 1897 there were more trial crushings by the Harewood Mill, this time of 319 tons from the Watkins reef mine, which yielded 74,65 ounces of gold. This was a yield of 4,27 ounces per ton which was well within payable limits. These results kept optimism high. There was also another rich strike during 1897 on the Mfule Mission farm near Melmoth which assayed out at four to five ounces per ton.⁴⁰ But according to the commissioner of mines in Zululand:

little has been done towards opening up the reef owing to the financial disabilities of the small local syndicate holding the ground. These small syndicates have hitherto been the curse of the mining industry in this country, they hardly ever do any good to their members, whilst they do an incalculable amount of harm to the country, owing to the fact that an immense amount of money is wasted without a chance of any satisfactory results being obtained, and consequently there are created a continuously increasing number of persons who 'have put money into Zululand' and got no return for it, and who thus become convinced in their own minds that there is nothing of any value at all in the whole country.⁴¹

But optimism remained high. In April 1898 Owen & Co. applied for a provisional store licence on the farm *Oakdale*, on condition that 'gold proper-

38 TV Bulpin, *Shaka's country*, p.221.

39 NAD, 1/Mel 5/1/7, Melmoth, Letter book, 1896-1897, 15 February 1897, p.822; 5/1/12, Melmoth, Correspondence and other papers, 1894-1898, PB 45/1897, 22 January 1897.

40 NAD, 1/Mel 5/1/8, Melmoth, Letter book, 1897-1898, 15 February 1898, p.233; NCP 8/1/6/6/3, Report of the mining industry of Zululand for the year 1897, pp.2, 16.

41 NAD, NCP 8/1/6/6/3, Report of the mining industry of Zululand for the year 1897, p.2.

ties on the farm prove successful'. Another new company, The Times Gold Mining Co., was launched at the same time to exploit gold deposits in the district. In 1897 a rich find in the Upper Nsuzi goldfields, from which three tons of samples were treated by the Rand Central Reduction Co. in Johannesburg yielded six ounces eleven pennyweight twelve grains per ton, led to an increase in the number of areas pegged. Work was also being done at Mfongosi in opening a body of gold-bearing ore that panned out from two to fifteen pennyweight per ton. At Nondweni the Zululand Syndicate, Ltd, launched in London at the end of 1897 with a nominal share capital of £30 000, had taken over a number of properties and was trying to work them. At the junction of the Buffalo and Tugela rivers Household was still working his Golden Dove vein. But by June 1898 most activity on the Zululand goldfields had practically ceased. This is also evident from the gold production figures for Zululand, which declined, from a high of 1 174 fine ounces in 1896 to a mere 57 in 1897 and nil for 1898. (There are no records for Zululand for the years 1887 to 1893. In 1894 784 fine ounces of gold were produced in Zululand with 264 fine ounces for 1895).⁴² What little prospecting and working of individual claims there was, ended with the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War in October 1899. Zululand's hopes of being the new Witwatersrand and Melmoth's hopes of being the centre of a new gold-mining area went unfulfilled.

The second anglo-boer war period

Although in the areas near to the border with the South African Republic most mining and prospecting activities ceased, activity continued in those areas further away. In September 1901, the Kranzkop Prospecting Syndicate announced a rich find in the Tugela River valley, but it never came to anything. The Jenkins Miller Gold Mining Co. had taken over Household's Golden Dove and in 1901 produced 79 fine ounces of gold from the crushing of old dumps. As a result of the crushings at this mine a small cyanide plant was also erected. But this mine was only worked for two months (January and February) in 1902 and although producing 63 ounces seventeen pennyweight was inexplicably closed down after being sold to an English company and production was only resumed a number of years later. Other producers

⁴² NAD, NCP 8/1/6/6/3, Report of the mining industry of Zululand for the year 1897, pp.14-15; NCP 8/1/6/5/3, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1898, pp.9-10, 19; 1/Mel 5/1/13 Melmoth, Correspondence and other papers, 1898-1900; PB 169/1898, 25 April 1898.

in 1901 were the Davis Miller Gold Mining Co. on the Upper Nsuze which produced 26 fine ounces while the Times Gold Mining Co. near Melmoth produced 30 fine ounces Both these companies suspended operations in 1902. Another concern, the Southern Cross Gold Dredging Syndicate, was floated in Durban in March 1902, for the purpose of dredging the Zululand rivers for gold. They sent machinery up to the Mfule River (a tributary of the Mhlathuze River arising near Melmoth) in May 1902. But the small suction dredge erected by the company was for a time stranded and useless because of the low level of water in the Mfule. Eventually 1 100 tons were treated but nothing was extracted except mud and the syndicate showed no profit and soon collapsed.⁴³

Post-anglo-boer war period

At the close of the Second Anglo-Boer War the Nondweni goldfields also received renewed attention and in November 1902 and the beginning of 1903 mining work was undertaken and the re-pegging of claims continued. In his monthly report for February 1903 the magistrate at Nqutu was full of confidence, saying that an 'era of prosperity for these [Nondweni gold] fields is confidently anticipated.'⁴⁴

But this optimism seems to have been misplaced since the gold production for Natal and Zululand showed little increase. Production for 1901 had been 143 fine ounces, but in 1902 had decreased to 78 fine ounces while a mere ½ fine ounce was produced for 1903 and nothing for 1904. There was an increase to 108 fine ounces for 1905 but this was largely due to the re-opening of the mine at Denny-Dalton which was being worked on a small scale by a tribute syndicate from Durban. (The Denny-Dalton area now fell within Zululand since the Vryheid, Babanango, Paulpietersburg and Ngotshe districts had been annexed to Natal at the end of the Second Anglo-Boer War). However, this operation was closed down again in May 1906. There was also renewed development work on the Dickson reef in the Nkonisa Valley on the Upper Nsuze goldfields in the Nkandla district where a Durban company, the

43 NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/6, Report of the mining industry of Natal for the year 1902, pp.11, 18-19; TV Bulpin, *Shaka's country*, p.263.

44 NAD, 1/NQU 3/1/8, Nqutu, Letter book, 1902-1903, Resident magistrate's report, November 1902, p.96; Feb. 1903, p.129.

Natal Proprietary Mines, Ltd, had taken over all the claims.⁴⁵ Their work there had led the commissioner of mines to comment optimistically that:

Personally, I am convinced that sooner or later one or more of the banket reefs in the Nkandla and Entonjaneni [Melmoth] Districts, will prove payable, and that they will become most important factors in the future development of the Colony.⁴⁶

Unfortunately this work on the Dickson reef was abandoned at the end of 1906. There were, however, some new developments on the Mfongosi gold-fields where two small batteries were set up: one on the Natal side of the river on the Phoenix reef (formerly the Sinclair) and one on the Ayres reef on the Zululand side near Mfongosi. Both batteries began operating towards the end of December 1906, but made no return of gold for 1906. Gold production for the whole of Zululand for 1906 was only 73 fine ounces but from 1907 onwards there was a substantial increase in the gold production of Zululand (1907 - 878 fine ounces; 1908 - 442 fine ounces; 1909 - 1 593 fine ounces). The output of 1 593 fine ounces (132 pounds) for 1909 was obtained from the following mines: Wonder mine (Pongola Valley in the Ngotshe district) - 1 281 fine ounces (a figure of 1 305 fine ounces - valued at £5 480 - is given in the annual report of the inspector of mines for the Eastern Mines Department Inspection District); Dumisa mine (Umzinto, south Natal) - 101 fine ounces; Harewood Co. (Melmoth) - 92 fine ounces; Tugela Mining Syndicate (Mfongosi) - 76 fine ounces; Dickson mine (Nkandla) - 17 fine ounces; Champion mine (the Champion reef was at Ngobevu on the Natal side of the Tugela opposite the Household reef on the northern bank) - thirteen fine ounces; Moore's mine (Nkandla) eight fine ounces; Nkunzana mine (Nkandla) - four fine ounces; Cooper's mine (Mpapala, Eshowe district) - three fine ounces.⁴⁷

Except for the Dumisa mine on the Umzinto delta in southern Natal and the Champion mine at Ngobevu in the Msinga district most of the gold was from Zululand with the bulk from the Wonder mine near Louwsburg. A London Syndicate started this mine in April 1905 on the farm Wonderfontein on the banks of the Pongola River. But all development work was stopped in August

45 NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/6, Report of the mining industry of Natal for the year 1902, p.1; 8/1/6/5/7, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1903, pp.5, 15; 8/1/6/5/8, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1904, pp.5, 10, 36; 8/1/6/5/9, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1905, pp.3, 7; 8/1/6/5/10, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1906, p.8.

46 NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/9, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1905, p.7.

47 NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/10, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1906, pp.3, 8; 8/2/9 Report on the mining industry of Natal for the years 1907-1908, p.3; 8/1/6/5/11, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1909, pp.3-4, 52.

1905 because of financial difficulties being experienced by the company. Subsequently the mine (and another in the area, the Klipvaal) was acquired by Richard A Rouillard, then head of H Eckstein & Co.'s mining department in Johannesburg. In April 1908 Rouillard had resigned from Eckstein's and travelled to Natal to mine these two mines himself. He used a small five-stamp battery to crush the ore and did all the smelting and extracting of the gold on a small furnace almost single-handed. But the Wonder mine became very dangerous to work and both mines proved to be 'pockets' and eventually became unprofitable. By 1910 Rouillard was bankrupt and had moved to Vryheid relinquishing the two mines.⁴⁸ An interesting development had been the new discoveries in the Eshowe district.

The rebellion reef, Mpapala

Towards the end of 1904 indications of gold had been found around the Mpapala (Impapala) Store, which lay at the foot of the Ntumeni mountains on the banks of the Matigulu (Amatikulu) River approximately 6,5 kilometres south of Fort Yolland in the Eshowe district. Some development work on this find, in the form of trenching to establish the extent of the reef, was done during 1905. But it was only in March 1906 that FA Middleton discovered what was reputed to be the main reef, which he named the Rebellion reef (this being the time of the Bambatha Rebellion), in the vicinity. Middleton, together with two others, thought the find good enough to be developed. Several assays were made each proving satisfactory. Accordingly a Rebellion Syndicate was launched to develop this find. Around November 1906 a test twenty tons of ore was transported to Pietermaritzburg for an exhibition of what the new Tremain battery was capable of. (This battery had been recently purchased by the Natal government with the object of being transported from place to place so as systematically to test ore raised in each district where gold was reported). At the same time an assay was done on the quartz. The results were encouraging being 8,75 pennyweight a ton.⁴⁹

48 NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/9, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1905, p.32; 8/2/9, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the years 1907-1908, p.51; 8/1/6/5/11, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1909, p.10, 52; V. Taylor, *Two families of Ile de France: A story of the Rouillards and de Chazals*, II (Durban, Privately Published, 1989), pp.303-304.

49 NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/8, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1904, pp.10, 36; 8/1/6/5/9, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1905, p.34; 8/1/6/5/10, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1906, pp.8, 32; TV Bulpin, *Shaka's country*, p.285; *Zululand Times*, 5 January 1907; 11 January 1907; 21 June 1907; and 29 November 1907. The Tremain battery was a small steam stamp with two stamps side by side working the same box and making about 170 drops per minute.

After tunnelling, the Rebellion reef was found to be only about twenty centimetres wide at the start and 1,5 metres below the surface. But when it had been followed down for about 7,5 metres it widened out to 1,36 metres and continued to increase in width so that at a depth of twelve metres it was 2,4 metres wide.⁵⁰

On the strength of the tunnelling results over two hundred claims were pegged around the Rebellion reef. At the beginning of 1907 all the other claims besides those being worked by the Rebellion Syndicate were amalgamated into the New Year Syndicate, made up mostly of Eshowe residents. The New Year Syndicate appointed a manager, a Mr Ogden, to develop their claims. After extensive excavations a new reef, the May reef, was discovered on 1 May 1907. (This reef was later shown to join up with the Rebellion reef). By the end of June 1907 Ogden had brought almost 50 tons of quartz to the surface ready to be crushed. Most of the quartz excavated showed traces of visible gold with the remainder panning out well.⁵¹

Next to the May reef two other reefs were discovered later and named the Havilah and Tshaka reefs. Another reef near J. Fry's store further up the Ntumeni mountains was found on claims owned by the Amatikulu Syndicate. This reef was found accidentally while ploughing for a garden. The reef having no outcrop broke the plough and when assayed showed good signs of gold and was also worked. By November 1907 the syndicates working these five reefs had all stockpiled quartz ready for crushing by the government battery. The Tremain battery was eventually transported to Mpapala during November 1907.⁵²

In March 1908 the first results of the New Year Syndicate's crushing became available. From 71 tons crushed a gold ingot weighing 15,63 fine ounces was retrieved, for which the syndicate received a sum of £51 18s. 5d. (including 5s. 11d. for the silver content less royalties to the government). (The gold price at the time was 77s. (£3 17s.) per fine ounce). On 19 March 1908 the New Year Syndicate held a general meeting to assess the results from the first crushing. The small gold ingot was also displayed at the meeting and shareholders were persuaded to fund additional crushing once the 500 tons free crushing by the government battery was completed. A second clean up of the plates took place on 1 April and from 107 tons of ore crushed 33,25 ounces of

50 *Zululand Times*, 29 November 1907.

51 *Zululand Times*, 15 November 1907; 29 November 1907; 27 December 1907.

52 *Zululand Times*, 29 November 1907.

smelted gold was recovered. From their last crushing of 73 tons the New Year Syndicate obtained 24,62 ounces, which translated into a yield of approximately 3,4 ounces per ton. (However, this was all the richest ore crushed and yields for the rest of the reef were put at 6,14 pennyweight per ton, which still remained a payable proposition.) On the strength of their results the syndicate engaged an expert, Carl Hall, to report on their property. His report was so favourable that they hoped the Mpapala reefs would be officially declared a gold field.⁵³

The Havilah Syndicate also obtained good results from their first crushing. In July 1908 this syndicate displayed in Eshowe a gold bar worth an estimated £150-£160. The syndicate was hoping to be able to float a company to further develop their property. The Tremain battery was moved to the Rebellion reef in September 1908 and from crushings there an average of 5,5 pennyweight per ton was obtained, which also made this reef a payable proposition. The owner of the Rebellion mine, FA Middleton, went ahead with his plans for developing the mine and building a dam to provide water for a water-driven battery he was erecting. (Unfortunately on 16 January 1909, after six months work, the dam burst.) Eventually in February 1909 the New Year, Havilah and Tshaka syndicates decided to amalgamate so as to be in a better position to develop their properties at Mpapala.⁵⁴

Developments elsewhere in Zululand

The apparent success of the Mpapala goldfields encouraged other prospectors to search elsewhere for gold or to restart old mines. At Mfongosi the old Phoenix and Markham's Surprise mines were again being worked by a Messrs Evans with crushing commencing in May 1907. In the Nkandla district a Messrs Weir & Delaney were developing a mine at Ntingwe while on the Nkonisa spruit Alexander Dickson and his partner, a Mr Gunderson, were developing the Dickson reef. By August 1907 the Konisa mine on the Dickson reef was working day and night shifts. Development work was also being undertaken at a mine at Nkunuzana in the Nkandla district. Also in May 1907 J.F. Muller had purchased the 'Bob Watkins' property near Melmoth and was busy dismantling the old Times Gold Mining Co.'s battery (on the farm

⁵³ *Zululand Times*, 20 March 1908; 10 April 1908; 14 August 1908; 21 August 1908; 4 September 1908; NAD, NCP 8/2/9, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the years 1907-1908, p.40.

⁵⁴ *Zululand Times*, 10 July 1908, 23 October 1908, 22 January 1909, and 5 February 1909.

Oakdale which closed down in 1902) for re-assembly on the Watkins reef. Optimism was running high and, according to the correspondent of the local newspaper, *The Zululand Times*, there was 'no reason why these Zululand "banket" formations should not be quite as successful as those of the Witwatersrand.'⁵⁵

Unfortunately for the small independent gold miners and prospectors some of the incentive to develop their mines was removed in August 1907 when the Natal government reduced the reward payable to gold prospectors who discovered a payable gold reef in Natal or Zululand from £1 000 to £500. However, the Natal government did try to encourage gold mining. They had bought the Tremain battery in 1906 while government stocks of dynamite were held at Nkandla, Melmoth and Eshowe. In 1909 the government had also sent a mining commission to visit Zululand, which took evidence at Vryheid, Nondweni, Sibudeni, Nkandla, Melmoth and Eshowe.⁵⁶

Gold mining operations continued in Zululand. On 5 August 1907 the Bob Watkins battery commenced crushing. From a crushing of 700 tons Muller obtained 63,15 ounces of gold. His battery was situated at the junction of the Harewood and Watkins streams. It was driven by a 75 centimetre Pelton wheel which itself was driven by water taken out of the stream above the old Harewood battery and led by a race about 1,6 kilometres in length to the site of the new battery. The ore was conveyed from the mine to the battery by a tramline 300 metres long. The owner/manager, Muller, was optimistic estimating that he had enough ore in sight to run the mill for two to three years and that at two penny-weight of gold to the ton, he would cover all his expenses including the mining and milling. A trial crushing of 80 tons from the nearby Umfuli Syndicate's mine in September 1907 returned one ounce of gold. Nevertheless optimism remained high.⁵⁷

Even more promising were the developments in the Nkandla district. Government assays from the Konisa mine showed that yields varied from five pennyweight up to 4,5 ounces of gold per ton with the Dickson reef varying from ten centimetres to 0,6 metres in width. At the end of November 1908 the Tremain battery was moved to the Dickson reef. In addition, the battery

55 *Zululand Times*, 24 May 1907; 31 May 1907; 7 June 1907; 5 June 1907; 2 August 1907; 23 August 1907; NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/6, Report of the mining industry of Natal for the year 1902, p.19.

56 *Zululand Times*, 23 August 1907; 15 August 1963.

57 *Zululand Times*, 16 August 1907; NAD, NCP 8/2/9, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the years 1907-1908, pp.39-40.

was now accompanied by a cyanide plant for better extraction (previously only the mercury amalgam method of extraction had been used on the Mpapala gold field).⁵⁸

The working of small discoveries continued all over Zululand. In March 1908 a Johannesburg syndicate erected a battery at the Mfongweni stream in the Nkunzana Valley near the Sibudeni store in the Nkandla district. They were hoping to run it on waterpower, which would make the mining of some of the low-grade ore in the vicinity payable. In the same month a Col. Peakman and a gang of six men arrived at the Denny-Dalton mine to put all the disused machinery into working order preparatory to starting up mining operations there again. In September 1909 the government mineral expert, Dr Hatch, inspected the Denny-Dalton mine taking a number of samples. He eventually pronounced himself favourably impressed which led to hopes of a revival of the fortunes of this mine.⁵⁹

At Mfongosi the Tugela Mining Syndicate continued to operate during 1909 crushing some quartz taken out of their mine as well as cyaniding about 500 tons of accumulated tailings. At the Phoenix mine a new company the Natal Gold Mines, Ltd, took over and built a road to the mine as well as substituting a suction gas engine for the old oil engine previously used to drive the battery. Crushings were also done on the Champion Reef at Ngobevu while the S & M Syndicate from Johannesburg began development work on the nearby Golden Dove and Household reefs. During 1909 the government Tremain battery did crushings on the Moore's and Dickson reefs in the Nkandla district. Small amounts of gold were obtained from small hand-operated stamps from the Nkunzana Valley and from the new Cooper's reef at Mpapala.⁶⁰

How successful was all this goldmining activity in Zululand?

Government production figures do not seem to reflect the true position and one suspects that not all of the output was reported to local magistrates. Many of the part-time farmer-miners kept any nuggets they found and used them as legal tender. It was only the registered companies who were legally bound to declare output for the purpose of paying royalties thereon. In addition, Zululand gold production figures were only included in the mine commissioner's

58 *Zululand Times*, 2 August 1907; 27 November 1908; 4 December 1908.

59 *Zululand Times*, 27 March 1908; 1 October 1909.

60 NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/11, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1909, pp.10-12, 38-41.

annual reports from 1897 onwards. If one merely takes the output of all the small mines as reported in the local newspaper, *The Zululand Times*, (even if it is in ounces and not fine ounces), a figure way above official statistics is reached. It seems that most of these small mine operators were making a reasonable living since operations were continued for a number of years. Many of the mines would close down because of a lack of money to finance the necessary development to ensure profitable operations, only to be re-opened at a later date. Obviously gold was present in payable quantities even if only in pockets. These pockets were extremely rich and most miners hoped to find pockets of such size as to make it worthwhile to continue mining. Production such as the five ingots recovered from 130 tons of ore mined from the Mfongosi mine owned by the Tugela Mining Syndicate and crushed over a period of 21 days in September 1909 certainly encouraged others to continue in the hope of similar success. (Assays at this mine had established an average yield of 7,5 pennyweight per ton making this mine a profitable proposition).⁶¹

Those miners unable to finance expensive expansion and machinery costs continued to work independent one-man operations. On the Minoru reef at Mpapala (the old Cooper's mine) a hand-worked 'dolly' over a period of 30 days in November/December 1909 extracted two ounces of gold from only 750 pounds (341 kilograms) of ore while another 3,75 ounces were recovered from the washing.⁶²

Mining operations after 1910

Operations continued at many of these mines throughout 1910 and right up to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. At Mpapala the New Year Syndicate property was taken over by T. Maxwell while in April 1910 the 'Dolly Boys' mine was being developed on the property of the Havilah Syndicate. In June 1910 a windlass was erected on the Minoru mine for the sinking of a new shaft. By August 1910 the Rebellion reef shaft was down to 30 metres and the reef was still showing. In November 1910 small amounts of gold were being recovered from the Dundee reef in the Nkunzana Valley in the Nkandla district.⁶³

61 *Zululand Times*, 24 September 1909.

62 *Zululand Times*, 3 December 1909.

63 *Zululand Times*, 25 February 1910; 29 April 1910; 10 June 1910; 26 August 1910; 4 November 1910.

In the Melmoth district there was also renewed activity. In March 1910 the government Tremain battery was sent up from Eshowe to Melmoth. On the Harewood farm WJ Edwards had been working the old Golden Hare mine on a tributary basis since the beginning of 1909. In June 1910 extensions to this mine had been pegged off. Towards the end of 1910 a Durban Syndicate formed the Vira Mines Ltd Co. with a share capital of £40 000 and a working capital of £18 000. They acquired the Harewood property from Edwards and appointed a consulting engineer, Prescott Upton, to evaluate the mine. After examining all the reefs on the property (the Harewood Main, Red, White, Black, Harewood Leader, Schist Lode-west and Schist Lode-east reefs) he was able by mid-1911 to recommend the full development of the mine. A reduction plant with the capacity of 3 000 tons to 4 000 tons per month was bought. By February 1912 the Vira mine was a hive of activity with the erection of new machinery and the mining of ore by a labour force of 150 Africans. The government had even built a branch road from Melmoth to the mine.⁶⁴

Development also continued elsewhere. On the Mpapala goldfields the Dolly Boys Syndicate had taken over the New Year property in September 1912 and installed a suction gas plant and pump to keep water out of the one shaft they were working. In the Nkandla district a new mine, the Nineveh, was opened in January 1913 on a Mr Wilson's farm. By May 1913 the Johannesburg Syndicate had opened up their mine at Sibudeni and were taking ore out of it while a syndicate from Durban had opened a new mine in the nearby Mome Gorge. There was also a three-stamp battery operating at Nkunzana. But all this activity came to a halt with the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. But in March 1915 a Durban syndicate floated the Labour Gold Mines Syndicate Co. with a capital of £20 000 to take over the Vira mine near Melmoth. Members of this syndicate consisted of wellknown labour leaders, such as Ralph Chatham, W.J. Carbis, ex-organiser of the SA Mine Worker's Union, J.J. Jones, M.E. Sam Parker, MPC, and a Mr Wyeth.⁶⁵

In the Nkandla district by 1917 only one mine continued to operate, the Nkunzana mine, which according to the resident magistrate appeared to be 'fairly well established, ...paying quite a good dividend.' (This mine was still operating in March 1920 with A. Paine as the manager.) But little other gold

⁶⁴ *Zululand Times*, 18 March 1910; 10 June 1910; 10 March 1911; 21 July 1911; 16 February 1912; NAD, NCP 8/1/6/5/11, Report on the mining industry of Natal for the year 1909, pp.39-40.

⁶⁵ *Zululand Times*, 27 September 1912; 17 January 1913; 6 June 1913; 28 November 1913; 4 September 1914; 19 March 1915.

mining activity seems to have taken place in Zululand for the duration of the First World War.⁶⁶

However, with the cessation of hostilities a number of the Zululand gold workings were restarted in 1919. At Mpapala A. Berry began crushing operations in May 1919. But a lack of finance seemed to be a great hindrance to the restarting of most of the small mines.⁶⁷ The failure by many of the small operators to obtain adequate financing led to some bitter complaints from local prospectors. One of them complained in the *Zululand Times* that: 'our minerals in Zululand seem to be locked up by capitalists, and will not open for fear of deterring the Johannesburg and European shareholders.'⁶⁸

There was a general feeling and belief by locals that mineral riches existed in Zululand but that in the past these were not exploited properly and that all that was needed was big capital to develop them so that they would become profitable. Unfortunately this was not quite the case as a number of investors had invested considerable sums in certain goldmining operations in Zululand, only to lose it all. The Enterprise mine at Nondweni had been operating independently for many years. In 1921 the owner of the mine, a Capt. Klerk, took samples from the tailings below the old battery. He had them assayed and they varied from eight to eleven pennyweight of gold per ton. He was able to interest some investors and in November 1921 mining interests from Johannesburg took over but soon found it unprofitable to continue mining operations at Nondweni.⁶⁹ It seems that the big mining interests thought that the Zululand goldfields were more permanent and continuous than they actually were. They were obviously misled by the richness of some of the ore samples. But on developing some of the mines they found out what most Zululand prospectors could have told them, viz. that the Zululand gold ores were extremely rich but occurred in pockets. These discoveries were ideally suited to small, often one-man, operations, which mined on a small scale clearing out the pockets and in the process making a reasonable profit.

A number of farmers continued with a little bit of amateur prospecting on their farms in the hopes of striking it lucky one day. One such lucky strike occurred in mid-1923 when J.F. Muller found a twenty-ounce nugget on his

66 NAD, Magisterial records of the Nkandla district (1/NKA), 3/2/1/4, Nkandla, Minute papers, 1914-1919, annual report of the magistrate, 21 January 1918; letter, 19 March 1920.

67 *Zululand Times*, 1 August 1919.

68 *Zululand Times*, 17 February 1921.

69 *Zululand Times*, 10 November 1921; 15 April 1937.

farm Konigsberg (next to the Vira mine operations on the farm *Harewood*) near Melmoth. In 1924 there were further discoveries of gold in the Melmoth district (on W. Havermann's farm *Langfontein* and on the farm *Bergvliet*). Once again there were rumours that Melmoth would become the 'Johannesburg of Zululand'.⁷⁰

Interest is re-awakened during the Great Depression

The economic hardship experienced by many during the Great Depression (1929-1934) seems to have re-awakened interest in the Zululand goldfields. In 1930 the tailings at the old Enterprise mine at Nondweni were redone which produced over £600 worth of gold. This success had led to the owners re-opening the mine and they even began transporting coal from a distance of almost 95 kilometres away so as to be able to fire their engines for crushing. In August 1931 in the vicinity of Qudeni in the Nkandla district three drives 300 metres long were sunk into the side of the mountain where 15 000 tons to 20 000 tons of ore was mined. The ore proved to carry four to 22 pennyweight gold per ton - a ratio that was regarded as payable. In October 1931 some hopeful prospectors had pegged out claims at Mpapala (now known as Ntumeni). In December 1931 there was renewed activity at the Vira mine near Melmoth when a new reef was discovered. Samples were crushed from this reef which gave several ounces to the ton. Small operations not requiring large amounts of capital continued to be established during this period. By March 1932 the old mine at Mpapala was again being worked. A recovery of five pennyweight per ton was being obtained from an outcropping reef. Even the Wonder mine in the Pongola Valley at Gobeni was re-activated and in August 1932 restarted milling operations. A rising gold price (it had risen from 84s. 11d. per fine ounce in 1932 to 124s. in 1933, 137s. in 1934 and peaked at 142s. (£7 2s.) in 1935) led to a corresponding rise in confidence of a number of operators. At Ntumeni (Mpapala) considerable development work was being carried on. Shafts three to six metres deep had been sunk on the Rebellion, New Year and Minoru reefs with good assay results being obtained. By August 1934 the main reef at Mpapala had been traced for sixteen kilometres and tested to depths of up to 30 metres. On 21 August 1934 the Natal Minoru Gold Exploration Company Ltd, with a share capital of £125 000, was registered to undertake mining operations at Ntumeni. By Decem-

⁷⁰ *Zululand Times*, 19 July 1923; 11 September 1924.

ber 1934 they had begun development work there. Eventually by September 1935 the Minoru mine had been re-equipped and trial crushings had been made of reef workings from various points on the property.⁷¹ Hope was held out to all these developers that with more modern methods of extracting ore many of the difficulties the pioneer prospectors had to contend with would be eliminated.

This new round of gold mining activity also spread to the Nkandla district. In February 1935 wholesale pegging of claims from the Melmoth district, through Nkandla and right up to the Qudeni mountain range occurred after a visit to the district by Sir Lionel Phillips and other mining men. A new reef was discovered near the Stanhope Store, which was some kilometres away from where the prospecting and mining operations had taken place in previous gold rushes. Shaft-sinking operations on this new reef seemed to prove that the reef widened out and systematic sampling revealed good values throughout. At the beginning of August 1935 there was great excitement in the district when the Minister of Mines, Patrick Duncan, accompanied by the government mineralogist, Dr Hans Pirow, and the Commissioner of Mines for Natal, a Mr Barrett, visited the reef and held discussions with the consulting engineer of the E.M.R. Exploration and Mining Co. (the developing company) to discuss the future development of the reef.⁷²

At the same time work had also again started up on the Upper Nsuzze gold field in the Nkonisa Valley. The original Konisa (Nkonisa) mine had been forced to close down many years previously due to financial and technical problems. However, the owner of the claims had been so sure of their value and despite many difficulties and bad times he had managed to pay 'exemption from developing' fees to the Department of Mines. For almost 30 years he had paid these fees, an amount of almost £500, in order to keep the claims in his possession. But he eventually died leaving his claims to a friend who, with the new developments taking place in the district, had been able to interest a London company, Bewick, Moering & Co. to give him financial backing to establish the Zululand Exploration Co. This company went ahead and began opening up the mine on the Nkonisa River at a site where the river meets the Nsuzze River gorge approximately eleven kilometres from Nkandla. The

71 *Zululand Times*, 3 September 1931; 22 October 1931; 3 March 1932; 18 August 1932; 2 March 1933; 16 August 1934; 23 August 1934; 27 December 1934; 19 September 1935; 26 September 1935; 15 April 1937; *Natal Advertiser*, 21 September 1935; *Natal Mercury*, 21 September 1935.

72 *Zululand Times*, 21 February 1935; 18 April 1935; 8 August 1935; 19 September 1935; *Natal Advertiser*, 21 September 1935; *Natal Mercury*, 21 September 1935.

company purchased a Holman's portable air compressor weighing seven tons and costing £1 250. This was transported with great difficulty to the mine site and used to drive four jackhammers, a pump and a winch. By mid-September 1935 mining operations were in full swing at Nkonisa. At Ntingwe the Somali mine was also being worked.⁷³

For a number of months in 1936 geologists and mining engineers from Johannesburg gave the whole Nkandla district an intensive and very extensive examination, tracing the banket reefs for a number of kilometres and fixing the reefs' location, and extent below the surface. However, as in past gold rushes, the reefs proved to be either too difficult to exploit situated in mountainous terrain with deep gulleys, encased in extremely hard rock or not continuous, therefore making mining unprofitable. By the end of 1937 most goldmining activity in Zululand had ceased. Except for a small operation in the Pongola Valley working the Wonderfontein reefs (the site of the old Wonder mine) little other gold was being extracted in the region. However, in 1945 General Mining and Finance Corporation Ltd of Johannesburg had obtained mineral options over large areas including Native Trust land in the vicinity of the old Denny-Dalton mine. A geological survey of the area was undertaken and test drill holes done but the samples obtained were disappointing. Eventually a small company began mining at Denny-Dalton and up to the early 1990s this mine and the Wonderfontein mine were the only two still operating in Zululand. Both have subsequently closed down because of escalating costs.⁷⁴

Conclusion

The pursuit of gold in Zululand is remembered chiefly by the number of failures, disappointments and discouragements that attended it. The first failure at Mfongosi in 1887 was put down to inexperience and amateur mining practices. There was certainly gold in Zululand, but finding it was one thing and recovering it was another. Speculators' high hopes were dashed on the reefs of Nondweni and Denny-Dalton where many people lost large sums of money on machinery and costly operations. It was no wonder that most people, except for an isolated number of prospectors, lost faith in the mineral

⁷³ *Zululand Times*, 19 September 1935; *Natal Advertiser*, 21 September 1935; *Natal Mercury*, 21 September 1935; NAD, 1/NKA 3/3/2/9, Nkandla, Minute papers, 1935-1936, file 8/4/2.

⁷⁴ *Zululand Times*, 25 February 1937; 1 July 1937; 29 November 1945.

riches of Zululand. Besides the geological problems of reefs not being continuous, that is occurring in pockets, and the gold being extremely refractory, many of the reefs were inaccessible to heavy machinery or were difficult to mine technically. Many of the mining ventures in Zululand suffered through inadequate working capital as well as trying to start up production before sufficient development work had been done. That a number of small operations remained reasonably payable over a number of years and that some gold mines struck extremely rich pockets also ensured that prospecting work was carried on for many years after the original gold rushes. Unfortunately the hopes of the locals of one day discovering a reef that would rival the Witwatersrand reef were never fulfilled.

However, within the context of the early development of mining in Southern Africa and the belief that there was paying amounts to be found elsewhere other than only on the Witwatersrand the gold prospecting in Zululand had continued – at varying paces of frenzy - almost unabated for more than fifty years (one can point to the success of such exploration in the development of the Freestate goldfields from the 1950s onwards). Moreover, if one views the encouragement by the Natal Colonial Government of mining exploration activities in the whole colony of Natal (including Zululand region) within the context of British Empire colonial politics the goldmining activities in Zululand must be considered of far more historical importance and relevance. Especially when viewed from the perspective of power politics, particularly in the lead up to the Second Anglo-Boer War wherein were encapsulated hopes (of certain policy strategists) of Natal becoming an alternative centre for profitable gold mining and the even more wishful hope was also expressed that, if profitable, such goldmining activities could well relieve the British Government of having to foot the heavy costs of the looming war with the independent Boer Republics. One can only imagine the thoughts of the officials in the British Colonial Office at the prospects of controlling not only the richest goldfields in the world on the Witwatersrand but also one that might well match or better it in the British Colony of Natal.

That there were rich pockets of gold was never doubted and today, with the high price of gold,⁷⁵ there are again investors who are prepared to speculate on the possibility that modern techniques of gold exploration and better min-

⁷⁵ At the time of the gold price peaking at around US\$1000/ounce in the early 1980s a number of speculators had renewed efforts to track down the old gold mining sites all over KwaZulu-Natal, even going so far as to do archival searches for old maps and reports (my assistance in this search was requested) in the Natal Archives Depot in Pietermaritzburg.

ing equipment will enable them to profitably exploit the gold reefs in Zululand and lead them to a new gold bonanza.