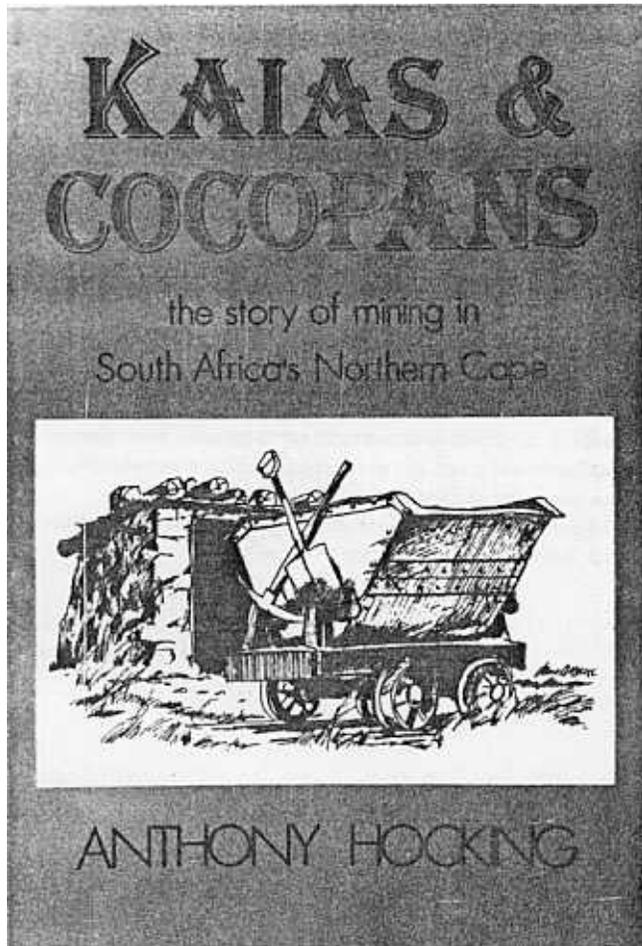


BOOK REVIEWS

A. HOCKING. *Kaias and cocopans: the story of mining in South Africa's Northern Cape*. Hollards: Johannesburg, 1983. 185 pp. Illustrated. R19,50 (exclusive). ISBN 0 620 06442 0.

Many people tend to regard the Northern Cape as a dry, desolate area, only capable of supporting an agricultural population. But a reader of this book would be astonished at the enormous mineral wealth of the Northern Cape. It is evident that historians have also underestimated this region for only a small number of historical studies have been published. Although this book is not the final word on mining in the Northern Cape, it is, nevertheless, still a pioneering study. In commissioning Hocking to write a history of the Northern Cape mining area, the Northern Cape Mine Managers' Association sets an example to be followed by their counterparts in other mining industries.



Kaias and cocopans tells the story of mining in a vast area: from Copperton (near Prieska) in the south to Pomfret (not far from the Botswana border) in the north; from Barkly West and Taung in the east to the Langeberg and Korana Mountains in the west. This region with more than 70 mining sites is viewed by many as South Africa's mineral treasure-chest. Mining, contrary to popular belief, did not start with the discovery of diamonds and asbestos during the second half of the previous century. The earliest inhabitants already practised a primitive form of pigment mining thousands of years ago (see Chapter I). In this chapter, Hocking also deals with the contribution made by travellers, like Lichtenstein and Burchell, to our knowledge of earlier mining practices and minerals, as well as recent important archaeological discoveries.

The author prefers to divide his chapters chronologically rather than by subject matter. Chapter II (1869-1914) pays attention to the discovery of diamonds, the development of the Barkly West river diggings, and early asbestos mining. Throughout the study a special attempt was made

(in which the author is successful) to establish and describe the different mining methods — from the time when the humble pick, shovel, and cocopan were the basic implements to the present-day's highly mechanised 150 ton trucks and giant bucket-excavators.

From the time of World War I onwards (Chapter III, 1914-1926) it is evident that the Northern Cape mining industry gathered momentum with the opening of new mines: limestone at Taung, asbestos at various places along the asbestos belt, and diamonds at Postmasburg. The account of Casper Venter's discovery of the West End diamond-mine, however, calls for verification. He did not accidentally walk across the Postmasburg commonage and pick up a diamond — he was in fact one of Postmasburg's first registered prospectors and in possession of a prospector's licence as early as the end of the nineteenth century. The description of the *Doppers* as *a strict sect within the Gereformeerde Kerk* is also perhaps a little irrelevant.

Kaias and cocopans does not only deal with mining but also with associated activities like donkey transport, railway development, and economic trends (Chapter IV, 1926-1935) which played such a decisive role throughout the mining history. With the opening of the Postmasburg manganese-field in the 1920s the Northern Cape's pace of development accelerated and it became known world wide. Besides keeping the reader up to date with the development of the asbestos, galena, and diamond mines informative descriptions of the early mining pioneers like T.L.H. Shone are also given in this Chapter.

Mining history is to a large extent the history of mining companies and accordingly the different Northern Cape companies play an important role in this book. Several new companies were founded during the years 1935-1945 (Chapter V) to exploit the rich manganese deposits; limestone at Ulco; tiger's eye near Niekerkshoop, and new asbestos ventures. It is significant that a prospector, H.S. Richter, had already discovered the world-famous Finsch diamond-mine near Lime Acres way back in 1930. Today it is South Africa's richest diamond-mine. After a short boom following the depression in the thirties the mining industry experienced another slump caused by World War II. Prior to this, geologists undertook an intensive survey that led, *inter alia*, to the discovery of the Kalahari manganese-field, the biggest in the world.

Chapter VI (1945-1954) marks the start of the development of the enormous iron ore reserves of the Northern Cape, especially at Sishen and Manganore. Coming across names like *Manganore*, *Lime Acres*, *Copperton* and *Mancorp Mine*, one becomes aware of how the mining industry changed the landscape of the Northern Cape. After World War II all branches of the industry experienced an unprecedented growth. This is also dealt with in Chapter VII (1954-1961) with the opening of the Kalahari manganese-field, new diamond-diggings like Bellsbank, and comprehensive expansions at the lime and asbestos mines. These extraordinary developments continue in the period 1961-1968 (Chapter VIII), the most prominent feature being the takeover and opening by De Beers of the Finsch mine.

Since 1968 the development of the rich copper reserves of the Prieska area, already discovered before the turn of the century, were undertaken (see Chapter IX, 1968-1978). Other aspects dealt with in this Chapter are the Sishen-Saldanha project; the new iron-ore-mine at Sishen to supply the increasing export market; the new limestone quarry at Danielskuil; the "modern" diamond diggers; the mechanisation; the underground manganese mining in the Kalahari, and how the Northern Cape serves the world with its enormous mineral riches.

In the concluding Chapter (post 1978), Hocking pays attention to the saving schemes of the various mines, as seen against the background of rising fuel prices and production costs. Also described are the living conditions and the sport and recreation in the mining villages. But the drawbacks of the mining industry are also highlighted, namely its sensitivity to unfavourable economic conditions and its instability as a temporary asset. The closing down of many mines during the present recession is proof of this. Fortunately, however, immense mineral reserves ensure the future of mining in the Northern Cape.

The result of Hocking's research is a fascinating record. In gathering material for this book, he relies to a large extent on interviews with

more than 150 Northern Cape mining men. By doing so, he preserves valuable information that would otherwise be lost. Since his interviews several of these pioneers have died. Some readers might, however, find the frequent use of direct quotations a little disturbing. Although a *select bibliography* is included, there is no indication of the comprehensive material that can be found in the Central Archives, Pretoria, the office of the Mining Commissioner, Barkly West, and in leading mining journals. The use of these sources could possibly have made this fine book an even better one.

A few errors occur: the dates of the incorporation of Griqualand West (p. 2) and the annexation of British Bechuanaland (p. 30) to the Cape Colony are both given a year too early (1879 and 1884 instead of 1880 and 1885); the division of British Bechuanaland into *Bushmanland* and *Gordonia* (p. 2) is irrelevant (Bushmanland lies for instance south of the Orange River); the name *Khoisan Bushmen* (p. 2) (Khoisan means Hottentots and Bushmen); *Korrana* instead of *Korana* (for example p. 2); *William* Hamilton (p. 17) instead of *Robert*; the area south of Postmasburg had already been surveyed in the 1870s and not between 1915 and 1917 (p. 39); the name of the village of Postmasburg was approved of by the government in 1892 and not in 1891 (p. 44), and *C.W. Malan* was minister of Railways and Harbours — not *Tielman Roos* (p. 58).

Nearly 50 illustrations are included in the publication, but a more detailed map than the one on the inside cover could have orientated the reader a little better. A fine index finishes off an overall excellent publication.

Kaiaas and cocopans can be recommended unreservedly. It is a welcome contribution to the history of an industry that makes such a substantial contribution to South Africa's economic prosperity.

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