

The founding of the Marloth Nature Reserve: A historic example of collaborative conservation

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Abstract

During the 1970s collaborative conservation between management bodies and citizens became a field of academic interest. It is globally practised today and implies consensus-based decision-making, often with a special emphasis on conflict resolution. Although collaborative conservation is a contemporary academic field, the history of the Marloth Nature Reserve, located in the Langeberg Mountains near Swellendam in the southern Cape, serves as a historic example of collaborative conservation. Created in 1928, the reserve originally comprised approximately 123 ha. Today, it is a World Heritage Site, 14 256 ha in size, with an abundance of mountain fynbos, birdlife and small wildlife. One of the most renowned national hiking trails, the Swellendam Circular Trail of 53 km, runs through the reserve. Although the determination of the original boundaries of the reserve in 1928 can be seen as a fairly successful example of collaborative conservation based on consensus decision-making, the inclusion of the foothills in 1942 resulted in a prolonged process of conflict resolution, with the main protagonists being the Department of Forestry and Ms Aletta Tomlinson, a life-long resident of Swellendam. This article gives an overview of this case study through the historic narrative, indicating how, through sheer persistence, Aletta Tomlinson eventually succeeded in procuring the foothills as part of the reserve and aided in securing the indigenous flora of the Marloth Nature Reserve as part of the Cape Floristic World Heritage Site.

Keywords: Marloth Nature Reserve; History; Collaborative conservation; Conflict resolution; Indigenous flora; Department of Forestry; Dr HWR Marloth; Ms AA Tomlinson.

Introduction

South African pioneer environmental historian, Jane Carruthers, regards environmental history as an extremely wide subject with diverse approaches, a variety of ecological thinking, and a philosophical state of flux. She defines environmental history as the relationship between humanity and the physical environment over time, and considers it a

powerful critique of societies and their world perspectives.¹ Not only is environmental history a field that has long been neglected in South African historiography, but Carruthers also observes that until the 1960s, conservation in South Africa took place in a haphazard and *ad hoc* manner with very little scientific foundation based on the concepts of biodiversity, ecosystems and their influence.² However, until the 1970s when the expansion of liberal thought gave prominence to environmental degradation and conservation in international debates on development, inattention to conservation was, to a large extent, a global phenomenon.³

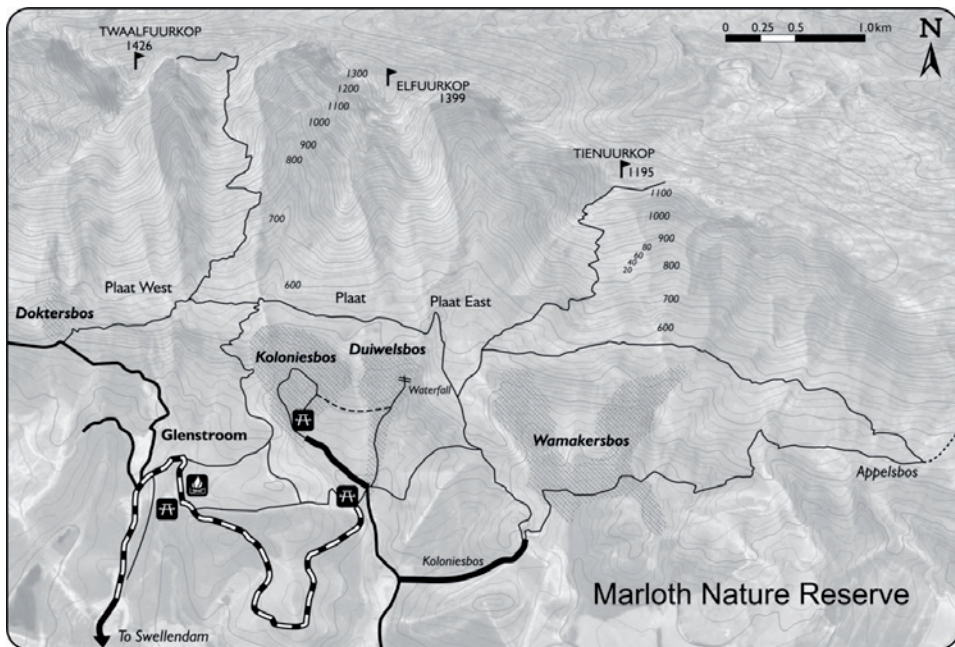
By 2017, governments are no longer the principal decision-makers in the environmental field. Diverse approaches to conservation and natural resource management are used, including community-based advances to accommodate local inhabitants and the social co-benefits of conservation.⁴ Rooted in the theories of global development, democracy and alternative dispute resolution, and based on the recognition of local dependency on surrounding environments and indigenous knowledge, the concept of collaborative conservation has become a field of academic interest. Collaborative conservation implies different actors negotiating diverse viewpoints on the use of natural resources, with a special emphasis on conflict resolution and consensus-based decision-making. Alex

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- 1 J Carruthers, "Towards an environmental history of Southern Africa: Some perspectives", *South African Historical Journal*, 23(1), 1990, pp. 184-185; J Carruthers, "Environmental history for an emerging world", *Conservation and Society*, 2013, pp. 17-18.
 - 2 J Carruthers, "Influences on wildlife management and conservation biology in South Africa c. 1900-1940", *South African Historical Journal*, 58, 2007, pp. 65-66; "Conservation and wildlife management in South African National Parks 1930s-1960s", *Journal of the History of Biology*, 41, 2008, pp. 205-206; "Environmental history with an African edge", C Mauch & L Robin (eds), "The edges of environmental history. Honouring Jane Carruthers", *RCC Perspectives*, 2014/1, pp. 10-11. Jane Carruthers distinguishes between conservation as the management and utilisation of resources to ensure perpetuation and preservation as no interference in the protection of nature. She indicates that during the 1920s and 1930s, two strongly opposing views on wildlife management were held in South Africa; that of a hands-off approach and the highly interventionist approach of state veterinarians and agriculturalists. The conflict resolution described in this article includes both. Aletta Tomlinson wanted the preservation of the natural vegetation, but this was not typical at the time, as the Department of Forestry managed the biome at Swellendam in line with conservation; J Carruthers, "Conservation and wildlife management...", *Journal of the History of Biology*, 41, 2008, p. 209; "Towards an environmental history...", *South African Historical Journal*, 23(1), 2009, p. 191.
 - 3 RS Reid, VL Scharf, C Huayhuaca, S Lynn, K Loyd & C Jandreau, *Collaborative conservation in practice: Current state and future direction* (available at http://www.collaborativeconservation.org/sites/default/files/fellow-product-docs/collaborative_conservation_in_practice.pdf, as accessed on 28 April 2017), p. 1; J Carruthers, "Towards an environmental history...", *South African Historical Journal*, 23(1), 1990, p. 186; "Influences on wildlife management...", *South African Historical Journal*, 58, 2007, p. 90.
 - 4 D Armitage, R de Loë & R Plummer, "Environmental governance and its implications for conservation practice", *Conservation Letters*, 5(4), 2012, pp. 245, 249; IJ Visseren-Hamakers, C McDermott, MJ Vijge & B Cashore, "Trade-offs, co-benefits and safeguards: Current debates on the breadth of REDD+", *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 4, 2012, pp. 1-3.

Conley and Ann Moote highlight the fact that many collaborative conservation efforts started as attempts to resolve specific disputes.⁵

Although the concept of collaborative conservation is a contemporary academic field, mediation and conflict resolution on environmental issues are part of human history, despite the differences with current principal lines of thought and planning. The history of the Marloth Nature Reserve (see Image 1), located in the Langeberg Mountains near Swellendam, can be seen as a historic example of mediation and conflict resolution regarding a specific environmental dispute.

Image 1: The Marloth Nature Reserve⁶



Source: CapeNature, *Brochure: Marloth Nature Reserve*

The reserve was created in 1928 and originally comprised approximately 123 ha. Today, it is 14 256 ha in size and its vegetation, consisting predominantly of mountain fynbos and patches of indigenous forest, forms part of the

5 RS Reid, VL Scharf, C Huayhuaca, S Lynn, K Loyd & C Jandreau, *Collaborative conservation in practice...* (available at http://www.collaborativeconservation.org/sites/default/files/fellow-product-docs/collaborative_conservation_in_practice.pdf, as accessed on 28 April 2017), p. 1; A Conley & A Moote, *Collaborative conservation in theory and practice: A literature review* (available at http://udallcenter.arizona.edu/publications/epp/pdfs/2001_conley_moote_collaborative_conservation.pdf, accessed 30 April 2017), pp. 3, 10.

6 Graphic designer of all images used in this article: Stephen Collett of Digi Pix.

ecosystems of the Cape Floristic Region, a World Heritage site, thus signifying its global biodiversity significance.⁷

Although the determination of the original boundaries of the reserve in 1928 can be seen as a fairly successful example of collaborative conservation based on consensus decision-making, the inclusion of the foothills in 1942 resulted in a prolonged process of conflict resolution, with the main protagonists being the Department of Forestry and Ms Aletta Tomlinson (1866 - 1949), a life-long resident of Swellendam. Like most of her peers, the scenic beauty and flora of Swellendam formed an important part of her childhood days.⁸ As an adult, she spent hours enjoying the calm of the veld. She would read or write letters or simply wander through the fynbos along the sloping foothills. Letters to relatives were filled with descriptions of the abundance and beauty of protea and fynbos and it is not surprising that she would go to great lengths to preserve the natural flora of the area.⁹

This article uses the narrative as methodology to highlight this historic case study of collaborative conservation. The focus is on the community and, more specifically, on the role of Aletta in the prolonged process of conflict resolution to conserve the natural flora on the slopes of the Langeberg foothills. In 1932 the Town Clerk of Swellendam, JP Kromberg, wrote:¹⁰

Not the Mountain Club, but Ms Tomlinson alone fought with the Department. All credit should go to her and there is no-one who does not appreciate and is thankful to her. With this I am not referring to the procurement of the reserve, but to the permission ... to keep the hill slopes free of forestry.

The information is based on a private collection of documents, kept by Prof. FR (Frederik) Tomlinson,¹¹ youngest son of Aletta, supplemented with and tested against newspaper reports and a memorandum on the Marloth Nature Reserve by the Department of Forestry.

7 CapeNature, *Brochure: Marloth Nature Reserve* (available at www.capenature.co.za/reserves/marloth-nature-reserve, as accessed on 1 May 2017); BW van Wilgen *et al.*, "Ecological research and conservation management in the Cape Floristic Region between 1945 and 2015: History, current understanding and future challenges", *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 71(3), 2016, p. 264. The date 1914 indicated in the latter source as the creation date, differs greatly from the date 1928 indicated in historical sources.

8 ME Rothmann, *My beskeie deel* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1972), pp. 27-29.

9 Private Collection Tomlinson (hereafter PCT), Letter: AA Tomlinson/Babs (her daughter), undated; PCT, Letter: AA Tomlinson/Ursula (her daughter), 21 July 1933.

10 *Die Burger*, 8 November 1932. Free translation of: "Nie die bergklub nie, maar mev. Tomlinson self en alleen, het dit met die voornoemde department uitbakei. Sy het dan ook alle eer daarvan en daar is niemand wat dit nie ten volste waardeer en haar daarvoor dankbaar is nie. Maar daarmee bedoel ek nie die verkry van die reserwe nie, maar die later verkry van toestemming ... om die omliggende heuwels van bosaanplanting vry te hou".

11 These documents were donated to the Drostyd Museum, Swellendam.

Background

When, by the end of the 19th century, public conservation discourses in middle-class Victorian England forwarded the idea of “nature loving”, it referred to game protection and not to indigenous flora.¹² Although the advantages of scientific ecological study and of training in natural habitats had been recognised since 1914,¹³ Brian van Wilgen and his co-authors state in a study on the Cape Floristic Region that as late as 1939, the South African population did not embrace the concept of scientific nature protection.¹⁴ For most of the 20th century, wildlife conservation was secondary to the primary goals of the government: the promotion of commercial agriculture and the productive use of land. With unification in 1910, conservation became a central government endeavour, with the Department of Forestry as the leading agency and Cabinet Ministers presiding over resolutions. During the first half of the 20th century, no coherent bureaucracy or guiding legislation for conservation areas or for their management was in place. In 1945, provincial authorities were tasked with the oversight of conservation projects, but without guidelines, principles or strategies. Timber needs, soil stabilisation and, as was believed, the amelioration of climate led to the proclamation of state forests and the encouragement of tree cover by landowners. The added emphasis on the protection of mountain catchment areas at the turn of the 19th century resulted in fynbos areas being allocated to afforestation with alien trees and, in line with the government’s intent of timber security, state afforestation was accelerated from the 1920s onwards.¹⁵

In 1921 the Council of Swellendam awarded an area of approximately 4 884 ha on the slopes of the Langeberg adjacent to the town, to the government for afforestation. This was done without the consultation of the residents of Swellendam and the latter was taken by surprise when, in 1928, the Department of Forestry fenced in the area and commenced ploughing it in view of afforestation.¹⁶ This step not only sparked a process of collaborative conservation, but it also served as the direct cause of the creation of the Marloth Nature Reserve.

12 J Carruthers, “Changing perspectives on wildlife in Southern Africa, c.1840 to c.1914”, *Society & Animals*, 13(3), 2005, pp. 188-189, 192.

13 J Carruthers, “Conservation and wildlife management...”, *Journal of the History of Biology*, 41, 2008, p. 210.

14 BW van Wilgen *et al.*, “Ecological research and conservation management...”, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 71(3), 2016, p. 258.

15 J Carruthers, “Conservation and wildlife management...”, *Journal of the History of Biology*, 41, 2008, pp. 207-210; BW van Wilgen *et al.*, “Ecological research and conservation management...”, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 71(3), 2016, pp. 218-219; 258-260.

16 *Die Burger*, 26 April 1928.

A case study of consensus decision-making: the creation of a nature reserve

Residents of Swellendam, including Aletta and members of the Mountain Club of South Africa, immediately took action. They contacted the Department of Forestry and asked a South African botanist, Dr HWR (Rudolf) Marloth, to assist them in conserving the fynbos vegetation on the slopes of the Langeberg by turning at least part of the area in question into a nature reserve. Despite the fact that the local officials of the Department of Forestry were sympathetic to their cause, they were unable to approach the government with the request for a nature reserve without a written document endorsed by the residents of Swellendam.¹⁷ The Department also insisted on the assistance of Dr Marloth as the person responsible for all government reports on nature reserves. At first, Dr Marloth was not keen to become involved. He held the belief that land was safer with government departments than with municipalities; nevertheless, familiar with the flora of the region, he was eventually persuaded to investigate the matter.¹⁸

A public meeting under the auspices of the Mountain Club of South Africa resulted in 500 residents signing a petition in which the government was requested to return the area in question to the Council of Swellendam. Aletta played no small role in drawing up the petition.¹⁹ On 26 April 1928 a deputation, consisting of the Mayor, JD van Eeden, a Council member, GA Scholtz, the representative of the Publicity Association and the Chamber of Commerce and a son of Aletta, LL Tomlinson, and the Reverend PK Albertyn, as representative of the Mountain Club of South Africa, met with the Minister of Agriculture, General JG Kemp, under whose jurisdiction afforestation was.²⁰ The process of collaborative conservation included negotiations on the fynbos vegetation and the closing of the entrance gates to Koloniesbos, as the latter would forestall excursions to the natural forests on the slopes of the Langeberg to the detriment of Swellendam tourism. Although the value and beauty of the Cape fynbos vegetation were only fully appreciated during the second half of the 20th century and people, such as RH Compton, Director of the National Botanical Gardens at Kirstenbosch, proclaimed the lack of vegetation and scenic protection in South Africa a disgrace in 1934,²¹

17 Department of Forestry, Pretoria, Information documents: Marloth Nature Reserve, *Memorandum...*, p. 1.

18 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, p. 1; *Die Burger*, 27 April 1928; *Die Burger*, 22 November 1932. The Mountain Club of South Africa was founded in October 1891 and Dr Marloth was one of the founding members.

19 TPC, Album 4, p. 3; *Die Burger*, 27 April 1928; *Die Burger*, 22 November 1932.

20 *Die Burger*, 27 April 1928.

21 BW van Wilgen *et al.*, "Ecological research and conservation management...", *Transactions of the Royal Society of*

General Kemp was favourably inclined towards the idea of a nature reserve and willing to set aside approximately 171 ha between Glen Barry River and Wamakersbos for this purpose. He also guaranteed free public entrance to Koloniesbos and Duiwelsbos and undertook to give immediate orders that the ploughing of the area be stopped. The request to return the land to the Council of Swellendam was, however, out of the question.²²

Members of the Department of Forestry, including the then Chief Forester, JC van der Bijl, and Dr Marloth, visited Swellendam during May 1928 and, accompanied by members of the Mountain Club of South Africa, the Council of Swellendam and Aletta, they inspected the area of the proposed nature reserve. The discussions took place at Morgenzon, the home of Aletta, where a photograph was taken on the grass in front of the house (see Image 2). The Department of Forestry's report states that resolutions on the nature reserve were taken in a spirit of goodwill. This said, it was obvious that the Swellendam residents harboured strong viewpoints on the preservation of the flora and the scenic splendour of the town, and not without merit.²³

Image 2: Collaborative Conservation at Morgenzon

Aletta Tomlinson is sitting in front in the middle and Dr Marloth is standing behind her. The others are representatives from the Department of Forestry, the Mountain Club of South Africa, the Publicity Association of Swellendam and the Council of Swellendam. Aletta's daughter is sitting next to her.



Source: Tomlinson Private Collection: Photo, Meeting at Morgenzon, 1928.

South Africa, 71(3), 2016, pp. 215, 258; J Carruthers, "Conservation and wildlife management...", *Journal of the History of Biology*, 41, 2008, p. 211.

²² *Die Burger*, 27 April 1928.

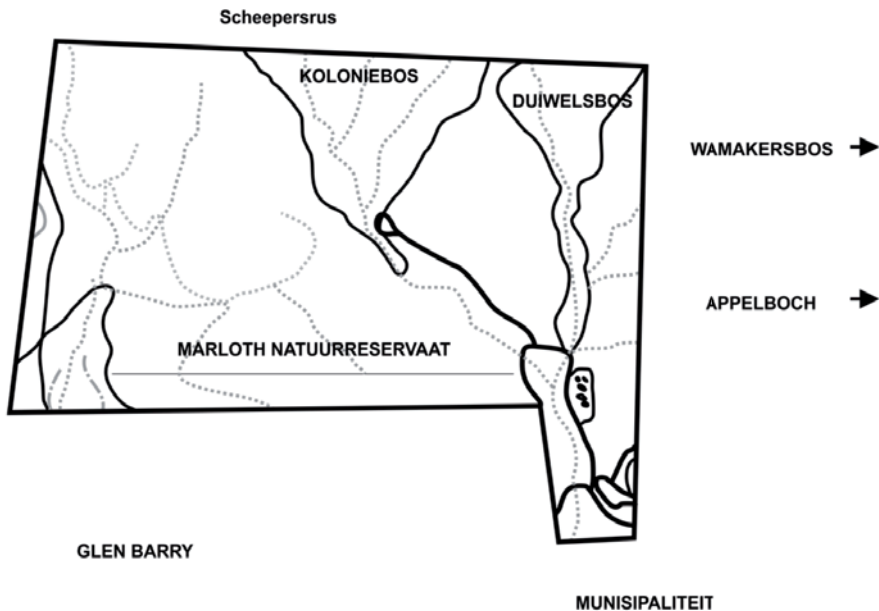
²³ Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, p. 1; *Die Burger*, 22 November 1932.

The conservation values of the time dominated. It was, to a large extent elitist, linking nature protection to outdoor recreation and aesthetic appreciation. In one respect the creation of the nature reserve was ahead of its time. In his address, Dr Marloth referred to the value of the region for scientific ecological studies, despite the fact that fynbos ecological science was initiated at Jonkershoek only in 1935 and did not flourish before 1965.²⁴

The new nature reserve was 123 ha large, somewhat less than the area anticipated by the Minister, but the Department of Forestry was convinced that the townsfolk – who, in consultation with Dr Marloth, participated in the survey of the reserve – would be content with the boundaries (see Image 3).

Image 3: The original boundaries of the Marloth Nature Reserve (as presented on an Afrikaans map, prepared for the post graduate studies)

The boundaries run in straight lines from the confluence of the two streams which have their sources in Koloniesbos and Duiwelsbos; to the ridge underneath Rondekop; from there in straight lines through Koloniesbos and Duiwelsbos to a prominent cliff on the eastern slopes of Duiwelsbos; then southwards in a straight line and then westwards in a straight line to close the near rectangular form.



Source: Department of Forestry, *Memorandum: The Marloth Flower Reserve, Swellendam.*

²⁴ BW van Wilgen *et al.*, “Ecological research and conservation management...”, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 71(3), 2016, pp. 210, 257.

In the report on the matter, the Department of Forestry emphasised that it would not be cost-effective to enlarge the reserve at a later stage and, should this be done, it would deprive the Department of valuable timber plantations. The greatest part of Koloniesbos and Duiwelsbos were incorporated into the reserve. The eastern area included rare species of *Erica* and the western slopes had an abundance of wild flowers. The rest was incorporated mainly for an unobstructed view of the scenic panorama. Collaborative conservation also included resolutions on the fencing in of the entrances to Koloniesbos and the Hermitiet. It was decided against due to the costs involved (between £70 and £80) and the fact that it would have divided the reserve into two sections. Further consensus-based decisions included that the land would remain the property of the Department of Forestry and that the Department would take responsibility for the erection of landmarks and fire-paths on the eastern, western and southern boundaries.²⁵

Conflict resolution: The foothills, 1928-1932

Although Aletta was grateful for the creation of the reserve, she was of the opinion that the foothills between the town and the nature reserve would be marred by pine and eucalyptus plantations and that the nature reserve would not be visible once the trees were fully grown. She wanted the area between Glen Barry River and Koloniesbos to be incorporated into the reserve, but received little support. Most residents believed that the Minister had been very accommodating, and Dr Marloth reminded her that compromises were part of life: “half een brood is beter den niks te eet nie [half a loaf is better than no bread]”.²⁶ Conflict resolution regarding the vegetation of the foothills was between Aletta and the Department of Forestry.

Since public opinion is often swayed by the press, Aletta voiced her opinion in both the Afrikaans and English press. On 26 May 1928 she stated in *Die Burger* that afforestation would not only restrict the view on the reserve, but it would also affect women’s strolls through the veld, as it would be too dangerous for them to venture through the plantations.²⁷ When General Kemp attended the Swellendam Agricultural Exhibition in February 1929, Aletta used the opportunity to approach him on the incorporation of the foothills as part of the reserve. General Kemp did not heed the request by affirming only that

25 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, pp. 1-4; *Die Burger*, 14 March 1929.

26 TPC, Letter: Dr Marloth/AA Tomlinson, 1 June 1928.

27 *Die Burger*, 26 May 1928; TPC, Album 4, pp. 2, 33.

the annual fire road would be on the plantations' side of the boundaries and not in the reserve.²⁸

Aletta did not lose heart. She approached the Swellendam Member of Parliament, G van Zyl Wolfaardt, and his mediation resulted in a decision by the Minister to keep the foothills free from afforestation. In a written confirmation of the decision to Aletta on 9 August 1929, the Minister's Private Secretary stated that the two foothills behind the town, for the time being, would be free from afforestation, or as long as the Minister was satisfied that it was not detrimental to the Department of Forestry.²⁹ Aletta received the letter with alarm. She immediately wrote to Wolfaardt, thanking him for his endeavours, but drawing his attention to the exclusion of the third hill, Skurwekop, from the designated hills, and the opportunity that it availed for afforestation at a later stage.³⁰ Wolfaardt replied on 15 August 1929, indicating that he had met with General Kemp and that the Minister was satisfied with Aletta's interpretation of the foothills. The exclusion of Skurwekop was an administrative mistake on the part of the Private Secretary and the reference to future forestry referred to circumstances in 75 or 100 years' time. The Minister was unwilling to compromise the government further and Wolfaardt was not prepared to bear any further pressure.³¹ Aletta then asked for a written amendment from the Private Secretary³² and sent a telegram to General Kemp, thanking him for saving the foothills.³³

Shortly afterwards, on 11 September 1929, Aletta received a letter from Van der Bijl, requesting her to confirm the foothills under dispute with the Town Clerk. Should the foothills fall outside the area already allocated to the Council of Swellendam between Glen Barry River and Koloniesbos, the boundaries should be brought to the attention of the local forester.³⁴ On 24 September 1929, Van der Bijl wrote to the forester, requesting firstly, that he explains to Aletta the need for landmarks, since it seemed as if she did not realise the importance of exact boundaries, and secondly, that the matter be resolved as soon as possible. Once everything had been finalised the surveyor would conduct an on-site investigation.³⁵

28 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, p. 4; *Die Burger*, 12 March 1929. Aletta was acquainted with General Kemp from the 1914 Rebellion.

29 TPC, Letter: J Tromp (Private Secretary, Department of Forestry)/AA Tomlinson, 9 August 1929.

30 TPC, Letter: AA Tomlinson/GvZ Wolfaardt, 13 August 1929.

31 TPC, Letter: GvZ Wolfaardt/AA Tomlinson, 15 August 1929.

32 TPC, Letter: AA Tomlinson/GvZ Wolfaardt, 19 August 1929.

33 TPC, Telegram: AA Tomlinson/General JG Kemp, 16 August 1929.

34 TPC, Letter: JC van der Bijl/AA Tomlinson, 11 September 1929.

35 TPC, Letter: JC van der Bijl/Mr Oosthuizen (the local forester), 24 September 1929.

The area indicated by Aletta was approximately 114.9 ha, bringing the total area under conservation to 171 ha, as promised by the Minister. The Department of Forestry reserved the right to clear the area of dead vegetation and, in the case of veldfires, to decide on the planting of exotic species.³⁶ Aletta was delighted and she organised a festive event in Koloniesbos, serving tea and cake to members of the Mountain Club.³⁷

In their correspondence, the Department of Forestry referred to the “Mev. Tomlinson-reservaat [Ms Tomlinson Reserve]”, but Aletta wanted the reserve to be named after Dr Marloth in honour of his address at Morgenzon on the scenic beauty of Swellendam, which she declared the most memorable she had ever heard of. From 10 June 1931 the reserve in its entirety became known as the Marloth Nature Reserve.³⁸ During this time, a nearly extinct specie of *Protea* was discovered in the vicinity of Swellendam and Compton recommended that Aletta, amongst others, should be approached to resettle the specie in the Marloth Nature Reserve.³⁹

Aletta kept a watchful eye on the foothills and immediately informed the local foresters when the self-seeded eucalyptus trees appeared.⁴⁰ Little did she realise that the self-seeded eucalyptus trees were not the greatest problem she would have to deal with in the near future. During October 1929, officials of the Department of Forestry consulted the Minister of Agriculture on the possibility of discontinuing all forestry in the Swellendam area and to request the Council of Swellendam to compensate the state for improvements to commonage. The Minister did not approve and recommended that afforestation should continue at a slow pace; not more than 20 ha per annum.⁴¹ This recommendation by the Minister, in line with the government’s aim to utilise land productively and to ensure timber security, eventually impacted on the conservation of the foothills. Conflict resolution between Aletta and the Department of Forestry was far from over and this time, the controversial issue of resource allocation was central to the resolutions. Based on the lack of conservation values regarding vegetation and scenic beauty at the time and the government’s pragmatic approach to land productivity, Aletta’s chances of success were slim.

36 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, p. 5.

37 TPC, Letter: AA Tomlinson/GvZ Wolfaardt, 19 August 1929; TPC, Album 4, p. 15.

38 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, p. 6; TPC, Letter: AA Tomlinson/Dr FE Geldenhuys (Head of Forestry), 20 May 1931; TPC, Letter: Dr FE Geldenhuys (Head of Forestry)/AA Tomlinson, 10 June 1931.

39 TPC, Letter: RH Compton/FW Brown (Forestry Officer), 30 July 1932.

40 TPC, Letter: AA Tomlinson/Mr Zahn (local forester), 29 June 1932; TPC, Letter: Mr Zahn (local forester)/AA Tomlinson, 5 July 1932.

41 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, pp. 5-6.

Conservation or employment opportunities?

Carruthers regards resource allocation as an extremely complex matter, shaped by extrinsic socio-economic and political circumstances with materialistic and idealistic motives intertwined or dominating each other.⁴² South Africa did not escape the economic consequences of the worldwide Depression of 1929, compounded by a prolonged drought which destroyed crops and livestock during the early 1930s. Unemployment was rife, especially in the rural areas, and relief measures to counteract poverty rose from 2.6% of the South African budget in 1930 to 15.8% in 1933.⁴³ These socio-economic conditions and the government's preference for land productivity and timber security led to a new phase of conflict resolution between Aletta and the Department of Forestry. Firmly rooted in this phase was the controversy regarding human needs and development versus preservation and conservation; a question determined by attitude and ideology and, therefore, not easily answered. In the case of the foothills, it was sheer wilfulness on the part of Aletta that led to her success.

In August 1932, 199 residents of Swellendam handed a petition to the local forestry office, requesting the afforestation of the foothills to enhance timber employment opportunities for the townsfolk. In view of the Minister's decision to conserve the natural vegetation of the foothills, the Department of Forestry advised the petitioners to first get the general support of the townsfolk and the consent of both the influential Mountain Club of South Africa and the Publicity Association of Swellendam. The Department was willing to await the outcome of these negotiations.⁴⁴

The suggestion to use the foothills for afforestation met with general approval among officials of the Department of Forestry. Owing to the location of the Marloth Nature Reserve, afforestation at Swellendam was forced to a standstill. To continue, it was necessary to obtain part of the farm Appelbosch, as the reserve was situated between the existing timber plantations and the areas awaiting afforestation. At this stage, the mayor of Swellendam, GA Scholtz, indicated to forestry officials that Aletta did not have a mandate from the residents of Swellendam to include the foothills as part of the Marloth Nature Reserve and that the Council of Swellendam would not oppose a written request for the afforestation of the hills, provided that the original nature

42 J Carruthers, "Towards an environmental history..." , *South African Historical Journal*, 23(1), 2009, p. 192.

43 H Giliomee & B Mbenga, *New history of South Africa* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2007), pp. 281, 283.

44 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, pp. 6-7.

reserve was left intact.⁴⁵ In an ensuing letter to the Council, the Department of Forestry highlighted the logistical problems caused by the division between the western and eastern afforestation areas, the employment opportunities of afforestation, and the danger caused by a lack of fire-fighters to control fires in both areas simultaneously. The letter enquired about the standing of the Council with regard to the petition, emphasising that the original area demarcated by Dr Marloth would not be interfered with. In the closing paragraph it was stated that the Department did not want to jeopardise good relations with the residents of Swellendam.⁴⁶

On receipt of the letter, the Council convened a public meeting for 2 May 1933. Many viewpoints for and against afforestation were expressed. Aletta appealed to the townsfolk not to allow the desecration of Swellendam's scenic beauty. On the other hand, the local forestry officials emphasised that the land belonged to the Department of Forestry and they were within their rights to proceed with afforestation, but, in the interest of good relations, they preferred to consult the residents and to obtain their consent. The meeting eventually proceeded to the vote. Forty-two voted against afforestation and 29 in favour of it. The forestry officials did not consider the meeting to be representative, or the matter resolved. The impression was that most of the residents were apathetic towards the matter and that Aletta and her supporters took care to be present.⁴⁷ In a letter to Frederik, Aletta acknowledged that they would have lost the vote, had she and a friend not persuaded people during the afternoon to attend the meeting. She also referred to the confused voting procedure, since the meeting could not decide whether all present were eligible to vote, or only registered rate payers were. The next meeting was convened for 11 July 1933.⁴⁸

Aletta immediately wrote to the Director of Forestry, Dr FE Geldenhuys, asking for the conservation of the natural vegetation of the foothills. She invited him to visit Swellendam for an on-site investigation of the scenery.⁴⁹ Dr Geldenhuys acknowledged receipt and promised to visit when in the vicinity of Swellendam.⁵⁰ A copy of Aletta's letter, a report of the meeting

45 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, p. 7.

46 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, pp. 7-8. During 1932 a polemic between Aletta and the Town Clerk of Swellendam ensued in *Die Burger* on the appropriate role of the Council of Swellendam in the creation of the Marloth Nature Reserve.

47 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, pp. 8-10; TPC, Speech: AA Tomlinson, p. 3.

48 TPC, Letter: AA Tomlinson/FR Tomlinson, 13 June 1933.

49 TPC, Letter: AA Tomlinson/Dr FE Geldenhuys, 23 April 1933. Aletta misspelled his surname as "Geldenhuis"; Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, p. 11.

50 TPC, Letter: Dr FE Geldenhuys/AA Tomlinson, 18 June 1933.

of 2 May 1933 and a response by the Department on Aletta's views were then forwarded to the Minister of Agriculture with a request to conserve the original Marloth Nature Reserve, but to proceed with afforestation in the remaining areas. Based on the recommendation of October 1929 that afforestation should proceed at a slow pace, the Minister's answer indicated that the matter had already been resolved. Aletta was informed accordingly.⁵¹

Approximately 200 people attended the meeting on 11 July 1933. Only ten voted against afforestation. Aletta was convinced that the employment opportunities and projected wealth for Swellendam were overemphasised. Despite her disappointment, her fighting spirit was not dampened. She once again contacted Dr Geldenhuys who accommodated her by ordering that the Rooidam area of 11.5 ha – a popular picnic site for townsfolk – be excluded from afforestation.⁵²

In 1934, the Department of Forestry started with afforestation in the Rooidam area and Aletta immediately protested. To accommodate similar viewpoints among other residents, the Council of Swellendam requested that the Department of Forestry conserve the natural vegetation of the Rooidam area. After mediation, the request was granted, but only for the time being and no guarantee was given that afforestation of the area would not proceed in future.⁵³

Again, Aletta did not lose heart and she contacted the Administrator of the Cape Province, M van Breda. On 2 July 1937, he informed her that the matter did not fall within the jurisdiction of the provincial authorities. He advised her to contact the Member of Parliament concerned and promised to discuss the matter with a personal friend of his, Dr JDM Keet, the Director of Forestry.⁵⁴ On 31 May 1939, well before 1943 when it became apparent that afforestation had caused many conservation issues in the Cape Floristic Region,⁵⁵ Dr Keet wrote a letter to Aletta in which he indicated that since all areas had been cultivated, the Rooidam area could no longer be excluded from afforestation. In line with the interventionist conservation policy of the time, he promised that the Department of Forestry would enhance the value of the Marloth Nature Reserve by cultivating indigenous flora in the reserve. He assured her that the

51 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, pp. 11-12; TPC, Letter: AA Tomlinson/FR Tomlinson, 4 July 1933.

52 Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, p. 12; Letter: AA Tomlinson/FR Tomlinson, 12 July 1933; Letter: AA Tomlinson/Ursula (her daughter), 2 August 1933.

53 TPC, Letter: Mr Zahn (local forester)/AA Tomlinson, 20 August 1934; Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, pp. 12-13.

54 TPC, Letter: M van Breda/AA Tomlinson, 2 July 1937; Department of Forestry, *Memorandum...*, pp. 13-14.

55 B van Wilgen, J Carruthers, R Cowling, K Esler, A Forsyth, M Gaertner, M Hoffman, F Kruger, G Midgley, G Palmer, G Pence, D Raimondo, D Richardson, N van Wilgen & J Wilson, "Ecological research and conservation management...", *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa*, 71(3), 2016, p. 209.

freedom and safety of the public would not be compromised and expressed the hope that conservation would always be an interest of hers.⁵⁶ It was obvious that the Department of Forestry was not willing to accommodate Aletta's viewpoints on the conservation of the foothills any further.

With sheer wilfulness and persistence, Aletta once again turned to the Member of Parliament for Swellendam, SE Warren. In him, she found an ally. Despite the Department of Forestry's explanation that afforestation of the foothills had taken place at the request of the residents for employment opportunities, resulting in a successful lumber-mill industry with vast expansion opportunities in the manufacturing of fruit trays for farmers, Warren considered the afforestation of the foothills a blatant injustice against the community of Swellendam.⁵⁷ His mediation led to a visit by Dr Keet and the Chief Conservationist of the Cape to Swellendam to investigate the matter. Aletta presented her case from the balcony of Morgenzon and finally the hatchet between her and the Department of Forestry was buried – afforestation would no longer take place on the foothills. On 29 April 1942 Aletta declared:⁵⁸

What a funny feeling – I do not need to write to the Department of Forestry's bosses any more – after years of moaning over the matter – Mr Warren, our Member of Parliament, came to our rescue ... from now on justice will be served.

On 3 June 1942, Aletta received a letter from Warren containing the consensus-based decision agreed upon by Aletta and the Department of Forestry and endorsed by the Minister of Agriculture. According to this document, the young trees on the crest of the hill were to be removed as soon as possible and the trees against the slopes in the course of time on reaching marketable height. The trees on the lower slopes would be left until they had reached cutting height, unless it could be proved that they obstructed the view on Koloniesbos and the Marloth Nature Reserve. The Minister also expressed his satisfaction with the conflict resolution between the different parties.⁵⁹

56 TPC, Letter: Dr JDM Keet/AA Tomlinson, 31 May 1939.

57 TPC, Letter: The Secretary of Forestry and Agriculture/SE Warren, 4 November 1940; TPC. Letter: SE Warren/AA Tomlinson, 19 November 1940; TPC. Letter: SE Warren/the Deputy Director of Forestry, 25 June 1941.

58 TPC, Notes: AA Tomlinson, 29 April 1942. Direct translation of: "Wat 'n snaakse gevoel – ek hoef nie langer te sukkel om te skrywe aan Bosbou hoofde nie – na lange jare se kerm oor die saak – mnr. Warren, ons Volksraadslid het tot hulp gekom ... van nouaf sal reg geskied".

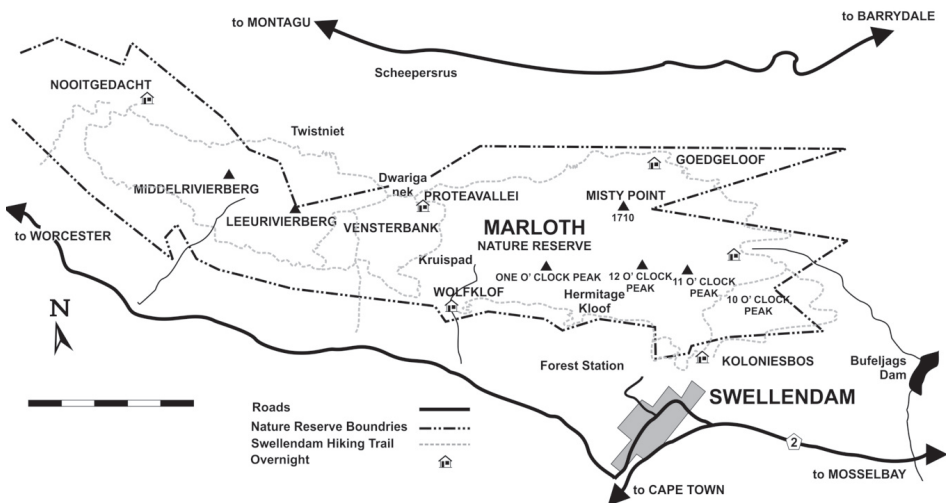
59 TPC, Letter: SE Warren/AA Tomlinson, 3 March 1942.

Postscript

In the early 1970s, the matter once again arose. Self-seeded trees grew on Skurwekop and Aletta's son, Frederik, wrote to the Secretary of Forestry, HL Malherbe, reminding him of the agreement with his mother. It took some time to locate the documents, but the Department then undertook to honour the resolutions. The trees were removed and proteas planted instead.⁶⁰ In 1981 the Marloth Nature Reserve was enlarged to approximately 11 000 ha, in line with Prof CL Wicht's recommendation of less, but larger areas of fynbos conservation (see Image 4).⁶¹

In 2004, ecosystems within the Cape Floristic Region gained World Heritage Site status and the Marloth Nature Reserve was added in 2015. These sites are recognised as having outstanding universal value and, in the case of the Cape Floristic Region, as being representative of significant ecological and biological systems and natural habitats for the conservation of biological diversity, including those of threatened species.⁶²

Image 4: The enlarged Marloth Nature Reserve in 1981



Source: HA Lückhoff, "Enlarged Marloth Nature Reserve and Swellendam Hiking Trail Opened", *Veld & Flora*, 67(3), September 1981, p. 68.

60 TPC, Letter: Prof FR Tomlinson/HL Malherbe, 11 August 1970; 10 October 1973.

61 HA Lückhoff, "Enlarged Marloth Nature Reserve and Swellendam Hiking Trail Opened", *Veld & Flora*, 67(3), September 1981, pp. 67-68.

62 B van Wilgen, J Carruthers, R Cowling, K Esler, A Forsyth, M Gaertner, M Hoffman, F Kruger, G Midgley, G Palmer, G Pence, D Raimondo, D Richardson, N van Wilgen & J Wilson, "Ecological research and conservation management...", *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa* 71(3), 2016, pp. 268-270.

Today the Marloth Nature Reserve is described as a “hidden gem” in the Langeberg Mountains with a variety of Protea and Erica, some of which occur nowhere else in the world. It also has a rich birdlife and an abundance of small wildlife, such as antelope, baboons, leopards and rock rabbits, and is home to the endemic *Ecchlorolestes nylephtha*, a species of damselfly, commonly known as the Queen Malachite, which is on the red alert list due to habitat loss. One of the most renowned national hiking trails, the Swellendam Circular Trail of 53 km, runs through the reserve.⁶³ Aletta Tomlinson played no minor role in securing the indigenous flora and scenic beauty of Swellendam for posterity. If she had acquiesced in the original decision on the boundaries, the possibility exists that the Marloth Nature Reserve may never have reached its present day dimensions to become part of a World Heritage Site.

Conclusion

The 21st century has brought significant challenges regarding biodiversity conservation, while the controversy surrounding resource allocation has not yet been resolved.⁶⁴ Through collaborative conservation, realistic compromises need to be found between different viewpoints and ideologies to protect ecological systems and natural resources for the benefit of all, including future generations. The collaborative conservation model of the Marloth Nature Reserve differs in many respects from contemporary concepts, but in the environmental history of South Africa it serves as one of the first demonstrations of scenic and floral conservation. It is also one of the first South African collaborative processes where the resolutions accommodated the community more than the state, albeit through the sheer persistence (for some stubbornness) of one woman. In line with the observations of Carruthers, this took place in a haphazard manner with very little scientific foundation based on the concept of biodiversity, ecosystems and their influence. Yet, today the community of Swellendam can reap the social co-benefits of the tourism industry; perhaps a more lasting heritage than that of the timber industry and more in line with strategic, rather than symptomatic thinking on sustainable development.⁶⁵

63 CapeNature, *Brochure: Marloth Nature Reserve* (available at www.capenature.co.za/reserves/marloth-nature-reserve, as accessed on 1 May 2017); MJ Samways, *Ecchlorolestes nylephtha*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2010: e.T6973A12818297* (available at <http://www.iucnredlist.org/pdfflink.12818297>, as accessed on 1 May 2017).

64 B van Wilgen, J Carruthers, R Cowling, K Esler, A Forsyth, M Gaertner, M Hoffman, F Kruger, G Midgley, G Palmer, G Pence, D Raimondo, D Richardson, N van Wilgen & J Wilson, “Ecological research and conservation management...”, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa* 71(3), 2016, pp. 209, 243, 283-287.

65 RW Flint, *Practice of sustainable community development* (New York, Springer Science & Business Media, 2013), pp. 25-29.