

Mid-Month Visit / Newsletter – July 2025

When planning Tours/Trips, one always needs to make sure that the time spent travelling to the various places of interest, and the time spent at the place of interest, is well balanced. This being at the back of my mind, a Breaker Morant tour has always been a tour with an uneven balance – too much time spent travelling to where the 'Breaker Morant activities' took place. After all, the infamous activities took place near Louis Trichardt – 4½ hours, or 450 kilometres from Johannesburg, a long time travelling in a 'bus'.

With an interest shown in such a tour, and a number of requests being received, a 'recce trip' was necessary. Having done one 'recce', it soon became apparent from asking questions, that there was more to this tour than others had considered. The Breaker Morant 'expert' lives near Louis Trichardt, and all tours start at the Lalapanzi Hotel, which accommodates a small, 'relative', museum. And so, with the expert staying in that part of the world, most people who want to do a Breaker Tour, travel for 4½ hours to get to the starting point – and these tourists are mainly Australians, for obvious reasons.

My 'recce trips' have formalised a more comprehensive tour, with a number of places of interest along the way. The town of Warmbaths, now Bela-Bela, has one of the better-preserved blockhouses, and two V.C.s were awarded to Tasmanian soldiers for acts of bravery. General Beyers, the Boer general who was very active in the Northern Transvaal was also very busy making life difficult for the British, in constantly attacking the railway line in order to get supplies. These attacks are not indicated by gravesites/cemeteries, even though casualties occurred. There being a railway line between Pretoria and Pietersburg enabled the British to send their dead and wounded to Pietersburg, and other towns along the line, in order to be attended to.



Picture: The blockhouse in Bela-Bela

One such incident resulted in the British suffering 15 casualties, 13 of whom were killed in action, and two who subsequently died of wounds received. Eight Gordon Highlanders were killed in the action and two died a few days later. All these casualties are buried in the military cemetery in Pietersburg. What a pity there is no monument commemorating this incident.

Putting together such a tour requires hours of research, as being a Tour Guide, one's commitment is to know, if not more than your audience, then certainly as much, so that one can engage in constructive discussion. Breaker Morant is all about the Bushveldt Carbineers, and there is no better book than the book by William (Bill) Woolmore titled 'The Bushveldt Carbineers and the Pietersberg Light Horse'. Woolmore records (page 42) – *"One of the links in the strategy to take over the Northern Transvaal was the formation of a new Corps of Colonials who could shoot and ride well, who could travel light and, if necessary, live off the land and beat the Boers at their own*



game. The idea had come from some loyalist businessmen who lived in the Zoutpansberg district. One of them, Joseph Ruben Levy, had raised the matter with Kitchener and obtained his approval.

Major Poore, Provost Marshal for the Pretoria District wrote in his diary on Tuesday 18th February 1901:- A man came to see me today called Mr. Levy. He had been sent by Lord Kitchener to raise a corps called the Bushveldt Mounted Rifles; the corps to be composed of men who had been turned adrift by the Boers, and I am to organise the Corps."

Mr. Levy was the proprietor of a hotel, and the trick would be to find the hotel, or the ruins of what was a hotel in 1901, and to plan a stop on the tour.

During any cycle of research, one is confronted with surprises and disappointments. The tour that I am working on has brought both, the latest of which was brought to my attention a few weeks ago. Was I surprised? Let me just state that we live in South Africa, and there is not much that surprises me when dealing with history. I have, in the past, referred to the state of Boer War cemeteries and have suggested that those interested in Boer War battles, get to them rather sooner than later.

My reference to the above relates to the house in Louis Trichardt, which was owned by Colonel Adolf Schiel, whilst he was resident in the area. It was a stop that all tours experienced during the Breaker Morant tour and has now been reduced to 'rubble'. The report I received two weeks ago read:- *"Rossbach, the classical homestead of Colonel Adolf Schiel, has been stripped to the ground by vandals who have taken doors, windows, all the piping and electrical wiring as well as the corrugated iron, Oregon pine ceilings and floorboards."*



Picture: Colonel Schiel

Colonel Schiel was born in Germany and saw service in the Prussian army. He came to the South African Republic in 1878, becoming a farmer, but later moving into the prison services. After the Jameson Raid, he was commissioned as Colonel and tasked with supervising the construction of what became the Johannesburg Fort. When the Boer War broke out, he was given permission to be part of the formation of the German Corps and a Boer Commando comprising primarily of the former prisons staff. Schiel was wounded and taken prisoner during the Battle of Elandsplaagte.

He was a prisoner on St. Helena for the remainder of the war, dying on 8 August 1903. He was certainly part of South Africa's history, and a 'player' in the Boer War.

With the above, almost being the order of the day, is now not an appropriate time to join a tour and relive the Breaker Morant story, before it is too late.

REMEMBER to keep an eye on our website (www.battletoursza.com) for regular updates and news.

Allan Gordon