First Nations Heritage Centre celebrates 1 year

First Nation News

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HERITAGE CENTRE ON THE MOVE

ZENZILE KHOISAN



BEACON OF HOPE

The First Nations Heritage Centre marked a full year since opening its doors.

The First Nations Heritage Centre at Riverlands in Observatory is marking its first full year of operations with growing recognition for its work in preserving Khoi and San heritage, culture and indigenous knowledge.

The anniversary coincides with the commemoration of the Khoi matriarch Krotoa, who died on 29 July 1674.

More than three centuries later, her legacy remains central to the centre's educational programmes, where she features prominently on the Wall of First Nations Heroes and Heroines.

Visitors have consistently praised the emphasis placed on Krotoa's contribution to South African history, while the stories of other First Nations leaders and the resilience of Khoi women have become integral to the centre's exhibitions and its Centre for Generational Healing.

The impact of the centre's work was evident during Youth Day, when high school learners and university students reflected on how their understanding of identity had changed. Among them was Eve Makriel, a Grade 12-learner from Modderdam High School in Bonteheuwel on the Cape Flats.

"Hearing about people such as Ashley Kriel, Anton Fransch and Dulcie September helped me see my history differently."

Makriel said that learning about these figures and her Khoi ancestors helped her realise she came from "a background of heroes" rather than being defined only by apartheid or the label "coloured". As a young woman from Bonteheuwel, she described the experience as empowering and one that deepened her appreciation of her heritage.

Her reflections echo those of hundreds of visitors who have discovered the centre through tours, community events, social media, First Nation News and word of mouth.

Anglican priest Father Oswald Cloete, who has been instrumental in building partnership between the First Nations Heritage Centre and the Ashley Kriel skills development centre in Bonteheuwel, stated that the work of the centre was "critical to the healing of all First Nation descendants".

The skills centre, which is located at the Bonteheuwel's Church of the Resurrection was established in honour of the greatly heralded anti-apartheid combatant from this Cape Flats township who was martyred when he was assassinated by apartheid security policemen in July 1987.

The young freedom fighter is featured among several other anti-apartheid activists and liberation fighters in the section of struggle heroes whose sacrifices helped bring down the internationally reviled apartheid system.

Father Cloete said the centre is restoring dignity to descendants of the country's first peoples by reconnecting them with their history, culture and identity.

"Our youth particularly must know that they are the descendants of the original custodians of this country who suffered grave injustice when they were dispossessed of their identity, culture and land," he said.

This message has also been echoed by local and international university delegations, who have praised the centre for helping integrate the history of South Africa's First Nations more fully into the national narrative.

Over the past year, the centre has built a substantial body of knowledge through its programmes and has established partnerships with leading academic, cultural and heritage institutions.

These include Iziko Museums, the Slave Church Museum, Nelson Mandela University's Indigenous Knowledge Unit, Inclusive Society, the National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, and the City of Cape Town's heritage and arts departments.

Professor Magda Minguzzi, head of the Indigenous Knowledge Unit in Nelson Mandela University's School of Architecture and the Built Environment, described the centre as an inspiring space for Khoi and San communities across South Africa.

"What has been done here to create a place where people can learn about their history and culture is truly inspiring," she said. "It is a special place that will encourage communities across the country to preserve indigenous knowledge and help young people gain a deeper understanding of who they are," Prof. Minguzzi said.



A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT: In the presence of the national elders Ouma Katrina Esau and Oupa Petrus Vaalbooi the leaders of the First Nations Collective and developer Jody Aufrichtig prepare to unveil the permanent place of anchorage for Khoi and San First Nations at the Heritage Centre at Riverlands.

Anchorage now a reality

ZENZILE KHOISAN, Chairman of the Western Cape First Nations Collective Trust reflects on one year of custody and stewardship

One year ago, the Western Cape First Nations Collective Trust (WCFNCT) reached a milestone that many believed would never be realised.

On behalf of the Liesbeek Leisure Properties Trust, Jody Aufrichtig entrusted me and my fellow Trustees of the Western Cape First Nations Collective Trust, with the keys of custody to the First Nations Heritage Centre at Riverlands, Observatory.

Accompanied by prayers, the sounding of shofars and the songs, dances and Khoigoewab chants of the South Roots International cultural group, it was far more than the handover of a building. It was the affirmation of a promise fulfilled.

For the descendants of the Khoi and San, it marked the establishment of a permanent place of anchorage on ancestral land from which our forebears were dispossessed centuries ago.

It was a profound moment of restoration, gratitude and hope. One that will remain etched in the memory of all who witnessed it. As we mark the first anniversary of that historic day, we have the opportunity not only to celebrate what has been achieved but to reflect on why it matters.

The First Nations Heritage Centre stands on land deeply intertwined with the earliest history of colonial dispossession.

In 1656, Jan van Riebeeck sought permission from the Dutch East India Company to settle colonial farmers along the Liesbeek River, on land that had long been under the stewardship of the Gorinhaiqua people.

A year later, that approval paved the way for the transfer of indigenous land into colonial hands, beginning a legacy of dispossession that would shape generations to come.

Among those lands was T'Groenewalt, of which the Riverlands precinct now forms part. The significance of the Centre therefore extends well beyond its physical walls.

It transforms a place once associated with loss into one dedicated to remembrance, restoration and renewal.

It gives practical expression to the Right of Return and creates a permanent home where First Nations identity, culture, language and heritage can be preserved, celebrated and shared.

The journey to this point was neither quick nor easy. It required perseverance through years of engagement, negotiation and, at times, determined opposition.

It demanded courage from those who refused to abandon the vision of securing a permanent First Nations presence in this historic landscape.

It also required genuine partnership. The relationship between the Liesbeek Leisure Properties Trust and the Western Cape First Nations Collective Trust has demonstrated what becomes possible when commitments are honoured. Together, we chose to build on trust rather than broken promises, establishing a Social Compact that secures the WCFNCT as the permanent custodian of First Nations interests within the Riverlands development.

That commitment remains as important today as it was one year ago.

The Centre is not an endpoint; it is the foundation for a much larger vision. Together with the indigenous garden, gathering spaces and broader heritage precinct, it provides opportunities for cultural revitalisation, education, dialogue and healing.

It offers future generations a place where they can reconnect with the wisdom, traditions and stories of their ancestors while sharing that heritage with all South Africans.

It is also a place of honour. Situated on a road named after the Gorinhaiqua leader Gogosoa, with views across the iconic mountain and the culturally significant Liesbeek River, the Centre pays tribute to those who defended this land with extraordinary courage.

We remember leaders such as Chief Gogosoa and the renowned warrior Nomoa (Doman), whose sacrifices remind us that the freedoms and recognition we pursue today were built upon the resilience of those who came before.

Throughout the handover ceremony, we expressed our gratitude to our ancestors and gave thanks to Almighty God for His faithfulness in bringing us to this moment. Those spiritual and cultural traditions remain central to our stewardship.



PARTNERSHIP: Chief !Garu Zenzile Khoisan and Jody Aufrichtig led the process to deliver the First Nations Heritage Precinct at Riverlands.

They remind us that this Centre belongs not only to the present generation but to those who came before us and those who will follow.

One year later, the First Nations Heritage Centre has already begun fulfilling its purpose. It has become a place of gathering, reflection and cultural expression. More importantly, it stands as a visible reminder that restoration is possible when justice, partnership and respect guide our actions.

The road ahead remains long. There is still much work to do to strengthen First Nations recognition, preserve indigenous knowledge and ensure that future generations inherit a heritage that is protected and valued.

Yet this first year has shown that meaningful change is not only possible, it is enduring.

Our anchorage is no longer an aspiration. It is a reality. The Centre stands today as living proof that history need not end in dispossession.

It can also tell a story of return, reconciliation and shared custodianship. As we begin our second year of stewardship, we do so with humility, gratitude and renewed resolve to ensure that this place continues to serve as a beacon of identity, dignity and hope for generations to come.

Architect's reflection on journey from concept to completion of Heritage Centre

Architect JO NOERO of Noeroarchitects reflects on the challenging, yet exciting project of designing the Heritage Centre.

A year after opening its doors, the First Nations Heritage Centre has become more than a building. It is a place of gathering, learning, ceremony and dialogue. It is a living expression of the First Nations commitment to honour the first indigenous people and their relationship with the land.

Rather than beginning with a fixed brief, the Heritage Centre emerged through an ongoing conversation between people who approached the project from very different perspectives.

On one side were the developers, tasked with delivering a viable project within the realities of budgets, planning requirements and construction constraints.

On the other was the Western Cape First Nations Collective (WCFNC), whose vision extended far beyond bricks and mortar. They sought not simply a building, but a place of dignity, recognition and cultural renewal.

The process was rarely straightforward. Ideas were debated, priorities negotiated and expectations continually reassessed. Yet these sometimes difficult conversations became the project's greatest strength.

It was a typically South African democratic process. Messy at times, but ultimately driven by participation and a commitment to finding common ground.

Central to that journey were the leadership of Chief Zenzile and the unwavering support of Elbert de Kock of Liesbeek Leisure Properties.

Together, they helped bridge different interests while keeping sight of the larger purpose: creating a permanent home for the country's First Nations communities.

Perhaps the most visible reflection of this collaborative process is the building itself.

The original proposal envisioned a relatively modest 350-square-metre cultural space integrated into the ground floor of the Riverlands Mall. As discussions evolved, however, it became increasingly clear that such a location could never adequately express the significance of the Centre or the stories it would tell.

What stands today is a freestanding 500-square-metre building with its own identity, carefully positioned within the landscape rather than absorbed into the commercial development.

The evolution from an internal cultural space to an independent building symbolised something far greater than an increase in floor area – it represented a growing recognition of the importance of First Nations heritage within South Africa's public landscape.

Rather than dominating its surroundings, the Centre was designed to belong to them.

Facing north, opening towards the Liesbeek River to the east and Lion's Head to the west, the building responds directly to the landscape that has long held spiritual and historical significance for First Nations communities.

Visitors enter across a welcoming terrace before moving through indigenous planting and a medicinal herb garden to an expansive outdoor gathering space.

The sequence deliberately blurs the distinction between architecture and landscape, creating a journey rather than simply an entrance.

This was fundamental. Our idea was that this would fuse building and landscape together, which in ancient terms, according to first nations culture, was exactly what happened.

Even though they couldn't build buildings the way we are doing now, their relationship with the landscape was an integral one, when they lived as part of this territory.

This relationship was fundamental. Although the original, ancient inhabitants did not construct permanent buildings in the way contemporary society does, their lives were inseparable from the landscape itself.

The Centre therefore seeks not to imitate historical architecture, but to reflect that enduring connection between people, place and nature. One year after opening, that vision has come to life. The outdoor spaces have become as important as the building itself, hosting ceremonies, performances and community gatherings that reinforce the Centre's role as a living cultural landscape.

One of the defining concepts that shaped the architecture was an idea that initially seemed almost contradictory: modesty.

The modern understanding of the word suggested something understated or self-effacing. Yet further exploration revealed a richer meaning. The Latin root *modestum* translates as "in the right proportion". An idea that ultimately became central to the design.

The result is a building that is intentionally restrained in scale yet ambitious in purpose. It sits quietly within the landscape, while the dramatic 9-metre-high, 27-metre-long mural wall announces the significance of the place.

The mural is brought vividly to life through artwork created by First Nations artist, Willa Boezak. The Centre itself remains welcoming and human in scale. The contrast between the intimate building and the powerful public artwork captures the essence of the project: modest architecture supporting an extraordinary cultural display.

Today, the mural has become one of the Centre's defining landmarks, inviting reflection, while announcing the presence of a history that can no longer remain invisible.

Throughout the design process, one principle remained non-negotiable. Chief Zenzile insisted that this should never become a museum trapped in the past. Instead, the Centre had to embody confidence in the future.

That philosophy shaped every architectural decision. Rather than drawing on historical styles or re-creating traditional structures, the building embraces contemporary architecture while remaining deeply connected to cultural identity. The result is a place where young people can learn about their heritage, while imagining their future. It acknowledges history without becoming constrained by it.

And a year after it opening, the Centre is fulfilling precisely that role.

It has become a destination for education, cultural exchange and reconciliation. It is becoming a place where the stories of the First Nations are shared – not as historical footnotes, but as an essential part of South Africa's continuing story.

Looking back, it is clear that the greatest achievement of the First Nations Heritage Centre is not measured only in concrete, steel or timber. The Centre's real success lies in the process that brought it into being: a project built through listening, negotiation and mutual respect; a partnership that transformed competing priorities into a shared vision.

One year after opening, the Centre stands as both an architectural landmark and a symbol of recognition.

It reminds us that meaningful architecture does more than create buildings – it creates places where communities can see themselves reflected. It is a place where histories are acknowledged, and where future generations can build upon foundations that were, for far too long, overlooked.

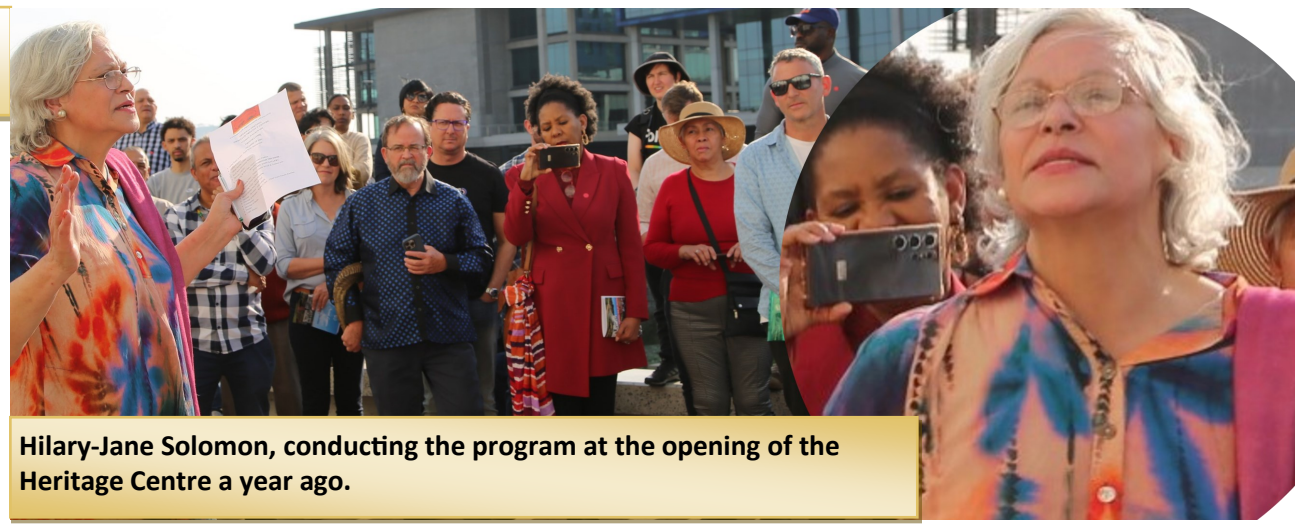


TEAM WORK: Architect Jo Noero (2nd left) with leaders of the WCFNC and members of the professional team, which successfully carried the First Nations Heritage Centre from a dream to a permanent place of anchorage.

Reflections on one year of custody and stewardship at Heritage Centre

Looking back as we move *forward*

HILARY-JANE SOLOMON, SECRETARY
WESTERN CAPE FIRST NATIONS COLLECTIVE



Hilary-Jane Solomon, conducting the program at the opening of the Heritage Centre a year ago.

It is time to give thanks. It is time to open the way. It is time to see the break of day. Every journey has a beginning. As we move forward, it is important to pause and reflect on how far we have come.

Looking back allows us to appreciate the progress made, the obstacles overcome, and the faith that has carried us through.

We can dream, imagine, plan, and hope for a better future. Yet, as Proverbs 13:12 reminds us, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life."

Fulfilled hope brings renewed strength, joy, and purpose. For the Western Cape First Nations Collective (WCFNC), the journey over the past few years has been nothing short of miraculous.

Despite negative media coverage, opposition, and significant challenges, we remained steadfast in our belief that the Creator, the Most High, had chosen and ordained this place of anchorage. Not for ourselves alone, but for future generations.

A significant milestone on this journey was our Thanksgiving Gathering on 14 March 2025. It provided an opportunity to reflect on the difficult road that led us to that moment and to acknowledge how faith, perseverance, and commitment had sustained us throughout.

The next major milestone came on 29 July 2025 with the official handover of the First Nations Heritage Centre from the developer to the WCFNC, the Custodians and Stewards.

This historic occasion marked the establishment of the first heritage precinct of its kind in South Africa.

It was a seismic shift for the dispossessed who were pushed to the margins of society.

The Most High, our Creator has restored the Foundation Nation to a place deeply connected to its ancestral heritage. A place where our ancestors endured injustice, disrespect, and suffering, yet where restoration has now begun.

Looking back, we recognise that the battle was never ours alone. Through unwavering faith, dedication, and commitment, a place has been established that we can proudly call the First Nations Heritage Precinct Centre.

As we commemorate the first anniversary of the opening of its doors, we reaffirm our commitment to our ordained identity, our calling as Custodians in role and Stewards in function.

This Centre stands as a lasting legacy for generations to come, a place where the Foundation Nation can begin a new chapter.

From the southern tip of Africa in Cape Town, this is where the message of Restoration begins: restoring what once was, acknowledging what should never have happened, and working towards what must now be.

When the doors of the Heritage Precinct first opened and visitors entered the gallery, they encountered more than displays, they encountered a living memorial.

The stories, legacy, and presence of our ancestors are now revealed for present and future generations within a place we can finally call home.

Here, we are no longer without identity or displaced by systems and structures. We know who we are, where we belong, and why we are strong.

To the Trustees and Partners of the WCFNC, let us always remember that we are Custodians by role and Stewards by function.

Let us continue to serve with responsibility, humility, and commitment, while remaining grateful for the journey that has brought us to this point and for the gift of time.

With thankful hearts, let us embrace the divine opportunity to partner with the Creator by honouring His presence in this place that He has entrusted to our care.

May we continue sowing seeds of love through righteousness in our relationship with the Creator and justice in our relationships with one another (Psalm 89:14).

May we also be examples and role models for the generations that follow. As Psalm 145:4–6 reminds us:

"One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. They shall speak of the glorious splendour of Your majesty and proclaim Your greatness."

Finally, let us value and use time wisely, for when we honour it, time itself will work in our favour.

Together, let us continue this journey of restoration, stewardship, and hope for the benefit of generations yet to come.

Sentrum getuig van voorouers se moed

KAPT. AARON MESSELAAR
Leier: Griqua Koninklike Huis



AARON MESSELAAR

Dit een jaar sedert die amptelike oorhandiging van die First Nations Erfenis-sentrum.

Dit is 'n belangrike mylpaal in die erkenning, bewaring en viering van die erfenis van Suid-Afrika se eerste inheemse volke.

Vir die Griqua-volk was dit 'n groot eer om deel van hierdie historiese geleentheid te wees.

Die Erfenis-sentrum staan as 'n lewende getuienis van die veerkragtigheid, moed en vasberadenheid van ons voorouers.

Dit bied Griqua-afstammelinge, sowel as toekomstige geslagte, die geleentheid om te leer oor die uitdagings, stryd en opofferings wat dié wat voor ons gekom het, in hul strewe na vryheid, waardigheid en selfbeskikking verduur het.

Die stigting van hierdie Sentrum het ook geleenthede geskep om verhoudings met ander inheemse gemeenskappe buite Suid-Afrika se grense te versterk. Dit het my in staat gestel om met ons broers en susters in die Nama- en Baster-gemeenskappe van Namibië te skakel.

Baie van hulle het 'n sterk belangstelling uitgespreek om hierdie belangrike erfenisruimte te besoek en meer oor ons gedeelde geskiedenis en kulturele verbintenisse te leer.

Een van die mees lonende aspekte van die afgelope jaar was om die opgewondenheid en trots op besoekers se gesigte te sien terwyl hulle die Sentrum en omgewing verken.

Die nuuskierigheid, vreugde en gevoel van behoort wat mense ervaar wanneer hulle hul geskiedenis, kultuur en identiteit in hierdie ruimte weerspieël sien, is werklik inspirerend.

Die First Nations Heritage Centre het meer as net 'n gebou geword; dit is 'n plek van herinnering, opvoeding, genesing en eenheid. Dit dien as 'n pilaar van hoop vir die Khoi-, San- en Griqua-volke en toon dat ons stories saak maak, ons erfenis waardeer word, en ons bydraes tot die geskiedenis van hierdie land nie vergeet sal word nie.

Terwyl ons hierdie eerste herdenking gedenk, eer ons almal wie se visie, toewyding en volharding hierdie prestasie moontlik gemaak het.

Mag die Sentrum voortgaan om te groei as 'n baken van inheemse kennis, kulturele trots en versoening vir geslagte wat nog kom.

Ons Erfenis. Ons Identiteit. Ons Toekoms. Niks vir ons, sonder ons nie.

Reflections on one year of custody and stewardship at Heritage Centre

ReRooted & ReAnchored

ALLAN FAUBIAN, FNR TEXAS IN THE USA



Allan Faubian blows the ramshorn at the Handover Ceremony last year in July.

A year has come and gone since we met to observe the official handover of the Heritage Centre from those who constructed the Centre to those who would keep and watch over it.

I think for many people that day was a surprise of sorts. My guess is there were some who doubted whether such a place would or could ever be established.

I also imagine that many were unprepared for what they observed and experienced upon first entering the Centre. My guess is there were even some who came with no expectations of what they would find since they had long concluded such a place would never be possible.

The Handover signaled that all doubts, fears, and questions about the existence and future of the Centre and the Heritage that it presents and trumpets were fully and finally answered.

The Handover was more than the conclusion of a commercial transaction. In effect, it handed back to the Khoi and Bushman peoples an anchored identity.

The Centre clearly tells the story of the numerous ways that identity was uprooted and displaced over several centuries. It shares the photo images of those who courageously and creatively acted to ensure that identity was not wiped out completely until it could once again be re-rooted and re-anchored in the same land given to their ancestors by the Creator Himself.

The re-rooting of the Khoi and Bushman identity through the Heritage Centre should alert everyone to the fact that new opportunities for growth and fruitfulness are once again firmly planted in the South African soil.

Once a suitable amount of time and care has been applied to the Centre and its mission, it is inevitable that an entirely new level of opportunity and abundant fruitfulness for the Khoi and Bushmen peoples will emerge.

Unlike past history, the future will witness the results of a well-rooted, well-grounded, anchored peoples.

Watered by the waters of Hoerikwaggo, the Centre will represent and testify to the future of a people whose identity and opportunities are sustainably supplied for as long as Hoerikwaggo stands.

Let everyone understand once and for all what has taken place and what must take place in the days and years ahead.

A place to remember our forebears with dignity

GOAS CHANTAL REVELL WCFNC TRUSTEE



CHANTAL REVELL

The year began with great excitement and gratitude for what we, as the First Nation Collective, have achieved. It was an emotional milestone to finally have a dedicated space for remembrance and celebration of the First Peoples of Southern Africa.

I reflected on the difficult journey that brought us here and felt deep appreciation for the individuals who stood with us. Drawn from different communities, they united with a shared vision and forged a path never taken before, one of unity and determination.

We are not simply another group seeking recognition, but a collective committed to reclaiming and honouring our heritage. At the Heritage Centre we can remember our forebears with dignity, respect, and gratitude for their sacrifices.

Guiding visitors through the Heritage Centre and sharing our stories authentically, free from politically influenced narratives, has been deeply rewarding.

The number of visitors, including schools, community groups, and young people, has been inspiring. The growing demand for tours and events reflects widespread interest from people of all backgrounds, regardless of race or creed.

The entire Riverlands site reflects our heritage. A street named after one of our ancient heroes, Gogosoa, now appears on Google Maps – a significant achievement that is unique in South Africa.

I remain forever grateful to our Heavenly Creator for entrusting us with the privilege and responsibility of being the custodians of the Heritage Centre.

My sincere thanks to the Western Cape First Nation Collective Trust, whose perseverance made this vision a reality, and to Chief !Garu Zenzile Khoisan for his steadfast leadership in ensuring this dream became a living, operational legacy.

Not Every Door Opens Same Way

CHARLES QUINT PROJECTS OFFICE

On the Riverlands Development, opportunity has not looked the same for everyone, and it should not have to.

For skilled tradespeople, like plumbers, electricians, plasterers, bricklayers and carpenters it has meant stepping into work they already knew and building on their experience.

For general labourers, it has often been a first chance to earn a wage on a major construction site.

Both outcomes matter, and both are part of what meaningful First Nations participation looks like.

Our role is far more than processing CVs. First Nations participation on Riverlands is built around a structured nine-point engagement process that guides candidates from their first conversation through to their first day on site, and continues after they start work.

Turning a contractual commitment into real employment requires consistent effort, follow-up, and support.

That support is critical. Because our team is present on site, we can help resolve workplace challenges, answer questions, and support workers as they adjust to a new environment.

Participation does not end with an interview or a placement; it continues through ongoing relationships that help people succeed.

For many general labourers, Riverlands has also become a pathway to something bigger.

Time on site provides valuable experience, builds confidence, and can open the door to future training or a trade career.

The journey has not been without challenges. Some candidates declined opportunities, some roles required repeated recruitment, and progress has varied across different areas of the project.

Our responsibility has been to keep the process moving and ensure that when opportunities arose, First Nations candidates had genuine access to them.



CHARLES QUINT

At the same time, we have been preparing for the future by building an organised database of job-ready candidates and their skills.

This means future employers can connect with qualified people more quickly, and no CV is lost or forgotten.

Riverlands has never been just about buildings. It has been about creating lasting opportunities.

None of this is finished, and it was never going to be finished on a single timeline.

Participation on a site like Riverlands is never simply a given. It is organised, tracked, and delivered – one candidate, one interview, one first day at a time.

Success is measured not only in concrete and steel, but in the number of First Nations people who leave the project with a job, an income, new experience, and a stronger pathway to the future.



Shining Brightly

The First Nations Heritage Centre at Riverlands has been heralded as a space of higher purpose where the culture, heritage, history and indigenous knowledge of South Africa's Khoi and San peoples has been actively celebrated over the last year.

Eco park and river trails



The green spaces of Riverlands feature a two-hectare Eco Park and six kilometres of heritage walks, eco-trails and running tracks. The concrete canal has been removed and the Liesbeek River restored to a natural riverine ecosystem. Millions of rands have been spent on indigenous landscaping that has greatly improved the bio-diversity of the environment and created a habitat for endemic fauna, including the Western Cape leopard toad, and local bird species including brilliantly coloured sunbirds, grey herons, and the malachite kingfishers.

Celebration of the First Nations' rich history and heritage





A historic social compact was signed in June 2021 between the Western Cape First Nations Collective Trust and the Liesbeek Leisure Properties Trust.

This declaration of partnership is the first of a kind compact between South Africa's First Nations and a developer within a sentinel space.

Under this compact a place of anchorage, celebrating Khoi and San heritage, under the custody and stewardship of the First Nations, was established.

Congratulations on first anniversary

On behalf of the Liesbeek Leisure Properties Trust, I would like to congratulate the Western Cape First Nations Collective on the first anniversary of the Heritage Centre.

What the Collective has created over this past year has made us enormously proud – a living space where First Nations culture, history and heritage are celebrated, shared and passed on to future generations.

From the outset, our vision was that the Centre would belong to the First Nations – theirs to manage, to run and to shape as custodians of their own story.

Seeing that vision come to life this year, entirely through the Collective's own leadership and creativity, has been one of the most rewarding outcomes of the entire redevelopment.

The LLPT remains in full support of the Centre and of our ongoing partnership, guided as always by the principles of collaboration, respect and transparency.

We look forward to many more years of watching it flourish.

Jody Aufrichtig, Trustee of the LLPT







Hub of activity at Heritage Centre

CRAFT AND HARVEST MARKETS

A great variety of crafts and Indigenous plants and products were on sale at the First Nations Craft and Harvest Markets in February and May this year at the First Nations Heritage Centre in Riverlands



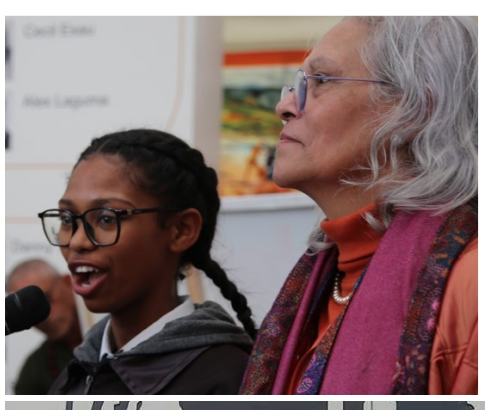













CELEBRATING BLESSING, REMEMBRANCE AND INSPIRATION

More than 200 youth from the Cape Flats and surrounding areas celebrated Youth Day on 16 June at the First Nations Heritage Centre.






Soapmaking workshop

Barbara Lynn from the Northern Cape held a soapmaking workshop at the Heritage Centre. One of the women who attended the workshop, Ingrid Pfeiffer, found it fascinating and informative.

"I enjoyed the workshop and was grateful that Barbara shared her extensive knowledge of indigenous medicinal plants with us, drawing on the traditional knowledge and wisdom passed down from Khoi elders and preserved through generations.

"Her demonstration of traditional boerseep was especially memorable, offering a glimpse into the patience, skill and craftsmanship of earlier times. She also introduced us to healing herbs such as buchu, devil's claw, stinging nettle, echinacea, and sage, explaining their traditional uses for burns, wounds and general well-being. Barbara reminded us that these are ancient herbs provide by God when He created the earth. Their healing properties were discovered in the veld by our Khoisan ancestors."

Visiting First Nations Heritage Centre

VISITING DELEGATIONS

There have been many groups of visitors at the First Nations Heritage Centre. These local and international delegations, expressed great interest in the centre's exhibitions, which present a cohesive narrative of South Africa's First Nations. Among the guests who visited were delegations from the Inclusive Society, Students from the University of Cape Town, Amazon staff members and a delegation of the City of Cape Town's Arts and Culture Department.





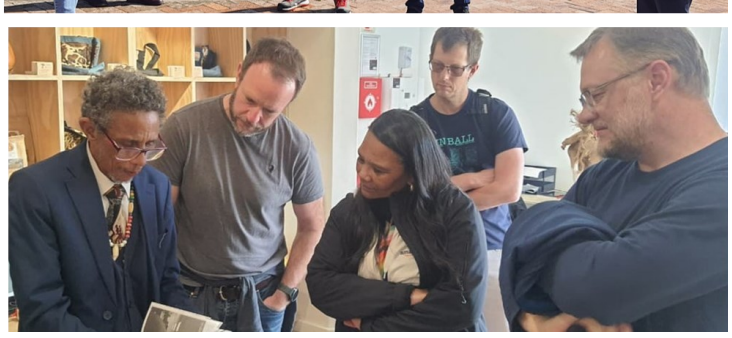












RIVERLANDS: THEN ...

Old Salt River Beach



The old Salt River beach, near to the historic site at which the historic Battle of Gorinhaiqua (1510) is said to have occurred.

Excavating the infill (2018)



Items such as hefty railway tracks, builders' rubble and heaps of discarded plastic, glass and other items had been unearthed before building could start at Riverlands.

Leaders visit empty site (2021)



Trustees of the Khoikhoi Peoples Rooibos Biodiversity Trust visited the site to see where the Heritage Centre will be build.

Petrus Vaalbooi visits site (2021)



Petrus Vaalbooi of the Kalahari Boesmans visited Riverlands when the development was started taking shape. With him are members of the First Nations Collective, Zenzile Khoisan, Chantal Revell and Hilary-Jane Solomon. Far right is Jody Aufrichtig, the developer.

ELATION AT SOD-TURNING EVENT (2024)



STARTING WALL OF REMEMBRANCE (2024)



MOUNTING EXHIBITION INSIDE (2025)



START GROWING THE GARDEN (2024)



FIRST NATIONS HERITAGE CENTRE

... AND NOW



















Start of the negotiation process









Building a partnership with the developer

The social compact between the Western Cape First Nations Collective and the Liesbeek Leisure Properties Trust was crafted over a long period of intense engagements.

These engagements, within which the negotiations defined the nature of the partnership, focussed on the process through which the descendants of the First People would realise their Right of Return.

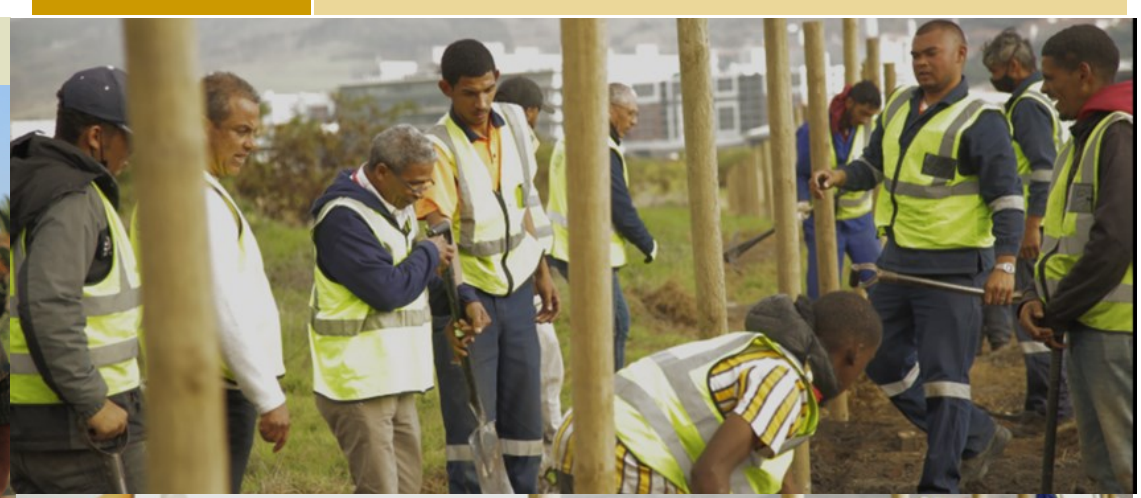
This was achieved by establishing a permanent place of anchorage within a First Nations Heritage precinct over which the First People would hold permanent custody.

Date	Milestones
2016–2017	Initial redevelopment proposals and indigenous engagement
2017–2023	Negotiations, social compact, and heritage centre planning
20 March 2024	Sod-turning and commencement of construction
December 2024	Building substantially complete
March-May 2025	Blessing and thanksgiving ceremonies
29 July 2025	Official opening of the First Nations Heritage Centre
July '25- July 2026	Educational and cultural programmes launched

Planning and Construction



SITE INSPECTION: Architect Jo Noero (2nd right), with Elbert de Kock (Zenprop) and Jeremy Jackson (First Nations Projects office) and others review progress at the development during a visit to the Riverlands development site.





TRENCHES AND FENCES: First Nations workers in action, digging the trenches for the erection of fences for construction to begin during the early phases of the Riverlands development.

The Gorinhaiqua - an enduring connection to Riverlands

ZENZILE KHOISAN & RON MARTIN

Long before Cape Town was invaded by the colonialist, the fertile area surrounding the Liesbeek and Black Rivers, were home to the Gorinhaiqua indigenous Khoikhoi tribe. The Gorinhaiqua was one of the principal Khoi pastoral communities of the south-western Cape.

The landscape now occupied by the Riverlands development was part of an extensive Indigenous cultural landscape where people lived, travelled, traded, grazed their livestock and maintained a profound spiritual and economic relationship with the land.

Long before European settlement, the Gorinhaiqua and neighbouring Khoi communities had developed intricate systems of land stewardship that allowed people, animals and the environment to exist in balance. These seasonal patterns reflected generations of accumulated knowledge about climate, ecology and sustainable resource management.

This way of life was profoundly disrupted with the arrival Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 to establish what was initially intended to be a temporary refreshment station for ships travelling between Europe and Asia. Very quickly, however, Van Riebeeck recognised the agricultural potential of the Liesbeek Valley and began advocating for a permanent colonial settlement.

During the early years, relationships between the Dutch and the Gorinhaiqua were characterised largely by trade. The Khoi exchanged cattle and sheep for European goods, enabling the settlement to survive.

Because livestock formed the basis of their economy, they could not simply sell young breeding animals without threatening their future prosperity.

In 1656 land was granted to free burghers along both sides of the Liesbeek River. Farms, fences and cultivated fields rapidly transformed the landscape that the Gorinhaiqua had relied upon for generations.

When the Khoi returned to their traditional grazing grounds after the winter rains in 1658, they encountered a dramatically altered landscape. Grazing routes had been blocked, access to water had become restricted, and permanent European structures occupied land that had always been shared seasonally. It became clear that this settlement differed fundamentally from previous encounters with foreign traders. The newcomers intended to remain permanently, and with that came the loss of ancestral land.

Among the Gorinhaiqua leaders who recognised the significance of these changes was Nommoa, more widely known through Dutch records as Doman. Intelligent, multilingual and politically astute, Doman had served as an interpreter between the Dutch and Indigenous communities.

In 1657 he travelled to Batavia, where he observed first-hand the consequences of Dutch colonial expansion elsewhere in the Dutch Empire. There he gained valuable knowledge of European military practices, administration and strategy.

Upon his return to the Cape, Doman immediately recognised similar patterns unfolding in his own homeland. He understood that the issue extended far beyond trade or temporary disagreements. The gradual occupation of grazing land threatened the survival of the Gorinhaiqua's entire social, cultural and economic system.

Initially, Chief Gogosoa sought peaceful negotiation. Recognising the military superiority of the Dutch, he attempted to resolve disputes through diplomacy, requesting access to traditional grazing lands and water sources.

While these efforts reflected a desire to protect his people from unnecessary bloodshed, they failed to halt the steady expansion of colonial settlement.

Doman reached a different conclusion. Believing that further delay would only strengthen colonial control, he organised coordinated resistance among younger members of the Gorinhaiqua and neighbouring Khoi communities. Rather than confronting the Dutch in open battle, he adopted strategic tactics designed to disrupt the settlement's ability to sustain itself. Raiding parties targeted livestock and crops, recognising that these resources were essential to the colony's survival.

These actions culminated in the First Khoi-Dutch War of 1659–1660, widely recognised as the first organised armed resistance by Indigenous South Africans against European colonial expansion.

Although the conflict is sometimes described primarily as a dispute over cattle, it represented something far more profound.

At its heart was a struggle for land, identity and the right of Indigenous communities to continue living according to their own traditions. The Gorinhaiqua were defending not merely economic resources but an entire way of life that had developed over countless generations.

Despite remarkable ingenuity and intimate knowledge of the landscape, the Gorinhaiqua could not overcome the superior weaponry and expanding resources available to the Dutch.

Colonial authorities responded with organised military campaigns, punitive expeditions and increasingly harsh measures against Indigenous communities. Rewards were offered for the capture or killing of resistance leaders, while farms were fortified and defensive structures erected throughout the valley.



The eventual military defeat of the Gorinhaiqua marked the beginning of a much broader process of dispossession that would continue for centuries. Traditional grazing routes disappeared beneath expanding farms, Indigenous communities were displaced from ancestral territories, and many Khoi people were absorbed into colonial labour systems or scattered across the region.

The resilience of the Gorinhaiqua was expressed not only through armed resistance in the seventeenth century but through the determination of later generations to maintain their heritage in the face of exclusion.

In recent decades, South Africa's broader process of recognising Indigenous histories has created opportunities to acknowledge the foundational role of the Khoi and San peoples in the country's past.

Increasing public awareness has highlighted the significance of sites such as the Liesbeek Valley as places where some of the earliest encounters between Indigenous communities and European settlers took place.

The Riverlands site has become particularly significant within this process of historical recognition. It stands not simply as a modern development but as a landscape layered with memory, where Indigenous history, colonial expansion and contemporary reconciliation intersect.

In 2021, descendants of Khoi and San communities gathered at the Riverlands site to commemorate what many described as a symbolic Right of Return to ancestral territory. The event brought together traditional leaders, community organisations and cultural practitioners to affirm the enduring relationship between First Nations descendants and the land of their forebears.

Ceremonies incorporating prayer, music, traditional instruments and Indigenous protocols reflected the continuity of cultural practices that have survived despite centuries of disruption.

Community leaders spoke of restoring visibility to histories that had too often been overlooked. They emphasised that recognition is not solely about remembering the past but about creating opportunities for future generations to understand the rich heritage of South Africa's First Peoples.

This recognition has informed commitments to incorporate Indigenous heritage within the Riverlands development through cultural spaces, heritage interpretation, Indigenous gardens, public art and educational initiatives.

Such measures seek to ensure that the story of the Gorinhaiqua becomes an integral part of the landscape once again rather than remaining hidden beneath it.

The Gorinhaiqua legacy therefore extends far beyond the events of the seventeenth century. Their story speaks to universal themes of belonging, stewardship, resilience and cultural continuity. It reminds us that landscapes are shaped not only by physical development but also by the people whose lives, memories and identities have been woven into them over countless generations.

Today, visitors to Riverlands stand upon land that has witnessed remarkable change. The rivers continue to flow, the mountains still overlook the valley, and beneath the modern city lies a much older story, one of a people whose connection to this place has never been extinguished.

A people who were resilient in the face of dispossession. Their determination to preserve their heritage, and their continuing presence affirm that Indigenous history is not confined to the past. It is a living legacy that continues to shape the present and inspire the future.

Against immense pressures, they defended their homeland, safeguarded their identity and carried their traditions across generations.

Today, as Riverlands looks towards the future, recognising this enduring legacy offers an opportunity to honour the first custodians of this landscape and to ensure that their voices remain an integral part of its continuing story, where they will be restored.

Where Heritage Grows: Preserving Indigenous Knowledge for future generations

Long before modern medicine and the concept of modern conservation Khoi and San communities understood how to harvest, manage and protect indigenous species sustainably.

By doing this, they ensured that ecosystems remained healthy, while they continued to provide food, medicine, clothing materials and other utensils.

Landscape architect **Jaco Jordaan** of Planning Partners Inc, noted that the Riverlands development demonstrated their commitment to a world "where people and biosphere are central to our collective responsibility to protect, preserve and develop heritage, ecology and the environment"

Jordaan noted that "the intention has always been to transform what was once considered a highly degraded landscape into one that is environmentally sensitive, ecologically balanced and culturally meaningful."



LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT JACO JORDAAN

This restoration included rehabilitated river corridors, indigenous wetlands, ecological corridors for wildlife and extensive indigenous planting that reconnects fragmented habitats while improving biodiversity.

The gardens at the First Nations Heritage Centre, form part of a much larger ecological restoration programme.

Jordaan explains that previous ecological assessments classified much of the site as severely degraded, with poor habitat quality for both terrestrial and aquatic species.

"Rehabilitation has focused on restoring natural ecological function rather than simply creating attractive landscaping.

"Concrete-lined sections of the Liesbeek River has been naturalised to create a broad indigenous riparian corridor planted with wetland vegetation."

According to Jordan, now new freshwater habitats, indigenous planting and ecological corridors provide habitat for birds, insects, amphibians and mammals, while improving natural water filtration.

He said special attention has also been given to the endangered Western Leopard Toad, with ecological corridors and carefully designed movement routes allowing the species to migrate safely between breeding and terrestrial habitats.

Nesting opportunities for kingfishers and habitat for numerous wetland species have also been incorporated into the landscape.

"The ecological corridor has been designed to reconnect habitats," Jordaan explains. "It facilitates wildlife movement while also functioning as public open space and an important flood attenuation area."

Water quality challenge

One of the greatest environmental challenges has been poor water quality within the Black River system.

According to Jordaan, pollution originated upstream and predated the Riverlands development.

"While the project cannot solve catchment-wide pollution, restoring natural riverbanks, wetlands and indigenous vegetation significantly improves ecological processes and water treatment within the site.

"Rather than hard-engineered canals, restored river systems slow water movement, encourage natural filtration and create habitat for aquatic life, demonstrating how ecological restoration can contribute to healthier urban waterways. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the gardens is their role in preserving cultural knowledge."

Developed in collaboration with representatives of the First Nations Collective, the ethnobotanical garden sits alongside the Heritage Centre, the ceremonial gathering spaces and the heritage-ecological trail.

Together these spaces create opportunities for storytelling, education and intergenerational learning.

Interpretive signage, guided walks and plant displays explain not only the medicinal uses of indigenous plants but also their roles in food preparation, ceremony, craft, shelter and environmental management.

The result is a landscape where biodiversity conservation and cultural heritage are inseparable.

As visitors move through the gardens, they discover that every plant represents more than a species—it carries generations of accumulated knowledge about living sustainably within one of the world's richest floral kingdoms.

In preserving these living traditions, the Riverlands Heritage Centre offers an important reminder that protecting biodiversity also means protecting the knowledge systems that have cared for it for millennia.

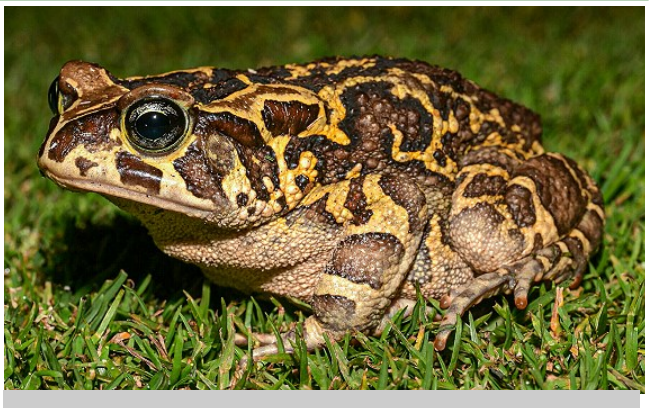
Biodiverse environment and habitat for endemic fauna

The green spaces of Riverlands feature a two-hectare Eco Park and six kilometres of heritage walks, eco-trails and running tracks. The concrete canal has been removed and the Liesbeek River restored to a natural riverine ecosystem. Millions of rands have been spent on indigenous landscaping that has greatly improved the biodiversity of the environment and created a habitat for endemic fauna, including the Western Cape leopard toad, and local bird species including brilliantly coloured sunbirds, grey herons, and the malachite kingfishers.









Western Leopard Toad

The Western Leopard Toad is a large amphibian with a yellow or reddish-brown body covered in dark, leopard-like spots. It has a robust build and large eyes.

Behaviour: This nocturnal toad hunts insects and other small invertebrates. During breeding season, it migrates to ponds and streams to mate. Males attract females with a deep call, and eggs are laid in long strings. Outside of breeding season, it hides under logs, rocks, or leaf litter.



African Sage (Bloublomsalie)
African Sage is a woody shrub with grey-green leaves and tubular, brownish flowers. It is commonly found in South Africa's coastal regions.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San used African Sage to treat colds, coughs, and bronchitis. It was also used for its antiseptic properties and to aid digestion.

Botanical heritage

The gardens at the Riverlands Heritage Centre are far more than a collection of indigenous plants.

They are living archives where ecology, culture and traditional knowledge meet, creating a space where visitors can experience the rich botanical heritage of the Cape, while gaining insight into the sophisticated environmental knowledge of the region's First Peoples.



Cape Aloe (Aloe ferox | Bergaalwyn
Cape Aloe is a succulent plant with thick, fleshy leaves edged with spines. It is native to South Africa and produces tall spikes of tubular, orange-red flowers.
Medicinal Uses: Cape Aloe was used by the Khoi and San to treat burns, wounds, and infections. Its sap was also ingested as a natural laxative and to aid digestion.



Elephant Bush (Spekboom)
Elephant Bush is a succulent with small, round leaves and reddish stems. It is native to the arid regions of South Africa.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San chewed Elephant Bush leaves to quench thirst and prevent dehydration. It was also used to treat sunburn and insect bites.



Snake Flower (Kopiva)
Snake Flower is a succulent with narrow, fleshy leaves and bright yellow, star-shaped flowers. This plant is commonly found in rocky terrains.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San applied Snake Flower gel to treat skin conditions like cuts, burns, and rashes. It was also used to soothe insect bites and cracked lips.



African Wormwood (Wilde Als)
African Wormwood is a bushy shrub with aromatic leaves and clusters of small, yellow flowers. It thrives in the wild regions.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San used African Wormwood to treat colds, flu, and coughs. It was also employed to alleviate digestive issues and fevers.



Cape Mint (Balderjan)
Cape Mint is a herbaceous plant with long, aromatic leaves and spikes of pale purple flowers. It grows in various regions across South Africa.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San used it to treat digestive issues, headaches, and respiratory problems. It was often brewed into a tea for its soothing and aromatic effects.



False Buchu (Baster boegoe)
False Buchu is a small shrub with aromatic leaves and clusters of small, white or pink flowers. It grows in South Africa's mountainous regions.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San used False Buchu as a diuretic to treat kidney and urinary tract infections. It was also used to relieve digestive issues and as an anti-inflammatory.



Lion's Claw (Wilde dagga)
Lion's Claw is a tall, bushy plant with bright orange, tubular flowers and long, narrow leaves. It is indigenous to South Africa's grasslands.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San used Lion's Claw to treat respiratory problems, high blood pressure, and fever. It was also valued for its calming effects and pain-relieving properties.



Eland's Sourfig (Ghoena-vy)
Eland's Sourfig is a succulent with large, fleshy leaves and bright pink flowers. It is native to South Africa's coastal areas.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San used Elands Sourfig to treat sore throats, mouth infections, and digestive issues. The juice was also applied to burns and skin irritations for its soothing effects.



Wild Garlic (Wilde knoffel)
Wild Garlic is a bulbous plant with long, narrow leaves and clusters of lilac or pink flowers. It emits a strong garlic-like scent. It its found in grasslands and rocky areas.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San used Wild Garlic to treat colds, asthma, and tuberculosis. It was also believed to repel pests and was planted around homes for protection against evil spirits.



Wild Rosemary (Kapokbossie)
Wild Rosemary is a fragrant shrub with small, grey-green leaves and tiny white flowers. It is indigenous to South Africa's coastal areas.
Medicinal Uses: The Khoi and San used Wild Rosemary to relieve respiratory problems, including colds and coughs. It was also valued for its antiseptic properties and used in treating headaches.

Snapshot of joyous Handover event at Heritage Centre



















