

Time Travel event, Wildebeest Kuil, Land dispute 1856

Goal

- To consider how the precolonial history of a site such as Wildebeest Kuil meshes with modern South African history. Such sites often get depicted as somewhat timeless entities ‘before history’.
- To examine one example of how land was transferred from indigenous to colonial ownership and how local people tried to resist this.
- To consider the consequences of the inevitable conflict – gains and losses for all.
- To make comparisons to today’s society
- To introduce the Time Travel method as a learning method

Target group

Learners in Grade 10: Colonialism & effects of colonial on local people – culture clash.

Facts

Rock engravings

This is a rock engraving site with some 200 engravings mostly depicting animals and people, on a low hill close to Kimberley. Also on the hill are a number of small stone circles where people dwelt, excavations resulting in radiocarbon dating to between 1000-2000 BP, and with known occupancy by Khoe-San people into the nineteenth century. One of the last known inhabitants of the hill was Kousop (one of the few Khoe-San people of this part of the colonial frontier known by name). He was a leader who posed resistance to colonial encroachment.

Kousop

Kousop led resistance to encroaching white settlers. In 1839 local Khoe-San leader ‘Degoep’ was asked to make his “X” mark on a document which effectively robbed him and his people of a vast tract of land centred on what is now the town of Boshof east of Kimberley. In some accounts it implies most of the western Free State that was thus signed-away. George Stow, writing in the 1870s (but first published posthumously in 1905), who was fascinated by rock art and sympathetic to the ‘Bushmen’, declared this transaction to have been nothing less than fraud. This was also the conclusion, in the 1850s, of Kousop, a relative of Degoep. Following some years of failed negotiation and agitation, Kousop led an uprising (1858). This was violently suppressed and Kousop and some 130 followers were killed in a battle not very far from Wildebeest Kuil. There was a subsequent miscarriage of justice where male prisoners were massacred while being taken to Bloemfontein to stand trial. Women and children were dispersed as indentured labour on farms. The President of the Free State Republic sought but failed to bring perpetrators of the massacre to book but had the women and children released from labouring on farms. With the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley at the end of the following decade, imperial conquest completely engulfed the region. Stow referred to the rock engravings of the area, such as at Wildebeest Kuil, as the ‘title deeds’ of the San people.

Scenario, Kousop's settlement, land dispute 1856

Kousop and his group of people have settled on the side of the hill as they always do this time of the year. Here is water and grazing for their sheep and goats and also a water hole for elands, buffaloes and elephants. The place has been used for thousands of years by hunter-gatherers and pastoralists and many have left drawings on the rocks. The land has always been, and still is, important to the Khoe-San people.

Kousop's group has built their huts and kraals and established themselves to stay here for several weeks. They take their sheep to the water holes. The women and children fetch some plants for eating and medicine and start to make some new baskets and mats. The men sit down and sharpen their tools and weapons. Everybody also prepare for singing, dancing and a good meal in the evening. And maybe also do a new rock painting.

It seems like a normal day in the kraal, but the group is under immense stress. Some years ago the white settlers came to the area and from that time on, nothing is the same. They have lost land and been involved in several conflicts.

Kousop has engaged Richard Miles, a Tswana catechist, that have been educated, to send letters of complaint to Free State farmers. Kousop demands that they vacate the lands of the Khoe-San. He rightly believes that the former transaction whereby Trek Boers acquired lands from Degoep (who did not have the authority to sell these lands) was fraudulent. He claims that the European Free State farmers are illegally occupying his people's ancestral lands.

Everybody in the Kousop group is eagerly awaiting the response from the authorities. The land rightly belong to them, so the request should be approved. But you never know with the settlers. They have weapons and power. What will we do if the requests are denied? Will we accept, try to negotiate or is war the only alternative?

Life for the pastoralists and hunter-gatherers is changing. Many are afraid that they have to give up their way of living. Or is it possible to live together with the European settlers?

Roles

The learners are Khoe-San boys and girls, belonging to Kousop's group

Kousop, Richard Miles

Soldiers

Everybody keep their age and sex

Key Questions

Land use/ land ownership, change of life, living together

- How do we use the land in a sustainable and fair way? Hunting, gathering, pastoralism, farming? Can we keep our way of living? Our traditions?
Who does the land belong to? Free State farmers, Khoe-San?
- How will we react to the reply from the authorities? Can we live together with the farmers? Or is war inevitable?

Activities

- Make stone tools,
- Make and paint beads
- Make rock paintings
- Face painting
- Prepare plants, fruit and dried meat
- Songs and dances

Time Plan

- 08.00 Preparations
- 09.00 Tea and registration
- 09.30 Welcome, background, scenario, roles, dress up, rules
- 10.00 Initiation
 - Dialogue: Kousop and Miles
 - Activities
- 10.30 Soldiers arrive, people gather, dialogue Kousop and warden
 - Discussions in groups to find solutions
- 11.00 Solutions are presented, agreement?
- 11.15 Food and dancing
- 11.30 Time Travel ends
 - Reflection
- 12.00 Leave

22 March 2016

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