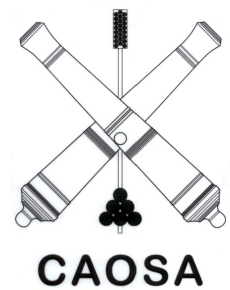


# CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

Cannon Association of South Africa c/o  
Chavonnes Battery Museum, Nedbank Building,  
Clock Tower Precinct,  
V&A Waterfront, Cape Town, 8000



SAPS Registration number: 28/1/3/8/2/1 23704

---

## NEWSLETTER No. 66 February 2019

An informative service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

### THE CANNON ON PAULSBERG - A PUZZLE

On the peak of Paulsberg on the Eastern side of the Cape Point Reserve is an old rusty Dutch 4 pounder cannon registered as Durr 333. The precise purpose of this cannon, and how it fitted in with man's perceived needs is a matter of conjecture, as no official explanation for its presence on the mountain has yet been located. The fact that Paulsberg has a commanding view of the entrance to False Bay may be significant.

From a military and tactical perspective such a lone small gun could not have offered any combat advantage as it did not cover any significant access route to the settlement in Table Bay, nor could it have any damaging effect on passing ships. The most likely purpose of the gun would be for the firing of some form of signal, but when? why? and to whom?

Jim Hallinan, then the Social Ecologist for the Cape Peninsula National Park, attempted to solve the riddle through much painstaking research. He unearthed several documents at the archives which present tantalizing clues and obscure hints which do not solve the riddle, but do provide material which promotes conjecture. The following letters were written in a time of relative peace, yet the signal post was manned and in operation. The need for the signal was therefore most likely more of an advisory signal than a warning or an alarm.

Mr Bird, Acting Colonial Secretary, writing to Mt PS Buissine, Deputy Fiscal on 29 March 1809. [ C.O. 4826/244 ] *"The Deputy Quartermaster General having reported to His Excellency that the signal hut at the Uitershoek on Pauls Berg is very much out of repair ..... you will see that the necessary repairs are done on the most reasonable terms ....."*

Here we have confirmation that some form of signaling was conducted from Paulsberg and that the hut was already in disrepair in early 1809, the third year of English occupation. The fact that the gun was being used during the English occupation does not necessarily mean that it was not used for the same purpose by the Dutch prior to January 1806.

Mr Buissine in reply to Mr Bird on 10 April 1809 [C.O. 19/9 ] .....*"(The hut) is in so bad a state that it cannot be repaired and wants an entire new construction ..... have met one by the name of Fredrik Lehman who will undertake it for seven hundred Rixdollars if made from mason work and four hundred if made of wood and rushes"*.

---

CAOSA, C/o Chavonnes Battery Museum, Nedbank Building, Clock Tower Precinct, V&A Waterfront, Cape Town, 8000  
Email: [secretary@caosa.org.za](mailto:secretary@caosa.org.za) Website: [www.caosa.org.za](http://www.caosa.org.za)

Committee: Martin Venter (Chairman), James Page Macdonald (Treasurer),  
Erika Foot (Secretary), Peter Underwood (Member), Gerry de Vries (Member)

This may imply that the original hut was made of wood and rushes which could have decayed within the three years of English occupation.

Mr Buissine to Col. Sir Edward Butler on 8 May 1809 [C.O.19/8 ] *“I’m truly sorry to say I have not been able to prevail upon the man at Buffel Fontein to accommodate **the Signal men at the foremost signal post**. He says that **one of them** has a wife and eight or nine children and he cannot possibly find room for them. The situation is deplorable ..... no shelter ..... they are exposed to the inclemency of all kinds of weather on top of a naked hill ..... an act of charity if you could prevent their perishing under the effect of the wet season”*.

The use of the plural form twice indicates that the signal post was of significant importance, hence more than one signalman and in permanent operation as opposed to as and when required. Were these signalmen English or Dutch?

H. Alexander, Colonial Secretary, to Mr Buissine on 11 May 1809 [ C.O. 4826/333 ]

*“..... you will explain to the man at Buffels Fontein the necessity of accommodating **the two soldiers** ..... Mr Underwood, Acting Quartermaster, will exchange the soldier with a large family for a single man until more permanent arrangements can be framed”*. (Ah – soldiers = English)

Mr Buissine in reply to H. Alexander on 16 May 1809 [ C.O. 19/7 ] *“ The man at Buffelsfontein has promised to fix up a place for the **signal man** (sic) stationed near his farm and accommodate **them** (sic) as well as possible and is to let me know the price he can do it for in a few days..... I have had the honour of conversing with Col. Butler about the removal of the signalman who has a family about him, but find that great inconvenience will attend this measure on account of the huts **at the other posts** being so small that they could not hold him and his family ..... “*

Here we learn that there were more than two signal posts in the system of which the Paulsberg gun formed a part.

Summing up what can be gleaned from these letters we have the “foremost signal post” on Paulsberg, meaning that the signal travelled in a Northerly direction to at least two more signal posts. These signals were not meant for the civilian population, as the posts were manned by military personnel and the very sparse Dutch citizens in that area were unlikely to react favourably to any signal by the English.

The absence of industrial and traffic noise pollution in 1809 meant that, in favourable weather, such as cold day with low cloud and a following wind, the sound of a 4 pounder gun firing a standard blank charge could be heard for about seven kilometers or more. With unfavourable weather conditions this could be reduced to less than three kilometers. A reasonable expectation would be for the signal to be heard 5 kilometers distant. Assuming there to be three or four such signal posts, then the signal could be transmitted by gunfire for about 18 to 20 kilometers, or as far as Simon’s Town, the only permanent military presence before Wynberg.

The naval presence in Simon’s Town could see only into the centre of False Bay and would consider it imperative that some form of warning should be received in the event of any belligerent ship or ships entering False Bay and threatening the anchorage. For this reason both the Dutch and the English had established coastal and anchorage defence gun batteries in Simon’s Town.

Assumptions and conjecture – absolute anathema to the true historian, but an interesting pastime for the amateur. Now I wonder where the other posts were! Perhaps one of the Simon's Town museums knows the answer.

**Please remember that the CAOSA AGM will take place at Ke-Monate Restaurant on the farm Hooggelegen in the Durbanville area on Saturday 09 March at 10h00. There are changes in the wind and your opinion and vote is important to the future of CAOSA.**

UBIQUE

Gerry de Vries - Researcher to the Cannon Association of SA.

E-mail [noongun@mweb.co.za](mailto:noongun@mweb.co.za)