



Old-timers tell of a coastline around Doringbaai lined by thorns, but today walking barefoot there is far less painful.

It's all in THE NAME

The evocative names of places and landmarks up the West Coast have either an enthralling story or loads of humour behind them, sometimes a bit of both

WORDS AND PICTURES KERI HARVEY



André Kleynhans has lived in Paternoster, the oldest fishing village along our Atlantic coastline, for more than 20 years. A self-described fisherman (and successful property developer), in his spare time he soaks up local history wherever he finds it, and when it comes to the West Coast his stories are captivating and his knowledge encyclopaedic.

“The first settlement of people here was on the Groot Paternoster headland, named for the Groot Paternosters that were rocks mapped on the old maritime charts,” he explains. “Then the people moved down along the bay and to the site of the current village of Paternoster, which was first called Klein Paternoster. Nowadays the village is simply known as Paternoster, and Klein Paternoster is a ‘suburb’ where I live, just about a block big.”

Paternoster might be the oldest fishing village along our Atlantic coast, but the origin of its name remains a mystery. André tells me there is no shortage of theories, one that the village was named for Khoi beads called ‘paternosters’, another that shipwrecked Portuguese sailors named the settlement. It’s believed they said the *Pater Noster* (Lord’s Prayer), and made it to shore and safety. “But even so, we don’t know the definite origin of Paternoster’s name and I am happy with that,” says André. “I like it staying a mystery because I might be disappointed if I knew.”

A little south of Paternoster, Tietiesbaai – an important fishing ground in the Cape Columbine Reserve – is simply an incorrect pronunciation. “A prominent fisherman, Jacob Titus, drowned there and the bay is named in his memory. It’s actually called Titus se Baai and the older fishermen still call it that,” says André. “When Pieter Pieterse lived there he called the area Tietiesbaai and it stuck. But people also claim that if you look northwards there is a small hillock with a rock on top of it that resembles a woman’s breast. She’s unlucky and only had one.” It’s certainly become the

TOP: Pieter-Dirk Uys brought Darling to the attention of the nation, when he moved there, bought the station building and opened Evita se Perron. ABOVE RIGHT: Jacobsbaai and neighbouring Tietiesbaai are both named after fisherman Jacob Titus. RIGHT: Many believe that Tietiesbaai is named for the hillock overlooking the area, with its ‘nipple’ seen here, silhouetted against the skyline.

preferred explanation, albeit incorrect.

A little further south along the coast is Varswaterbaai, which had the only fresh water in the area, and just south of that is Jacobsbaai, also named after Jacob Titus, who has certainly made his mark in this area.

Yzerfontein, some 80km south of Paternoster often is also mispronounced Ysterfontein, even though it’s believed to be named after the farm it’s located on, which had a spring that bubbled through ironstone. As you drive up the R27 from Cape Town, there is a set of crossroads where Yzerfontein is to the left towards the Atlantic, and Darling to the right.

Firmly placed on the map by Pieter-Dirk Uys and his Evita se Perron theatre and restaurant,





ABOVE: The village of Paternoster was previously known as Klein Paternoster, now the name of a unique, small, housing development with traditional fishermen-style homes, where André Kleynhans lives. RIGHT: Many permanent residents live in Yzerfontein, and homes have magnificent Atlantic views. LEFT: The name Hopefield might not have enchanting origins, but the town's church is beautiful and photogenic

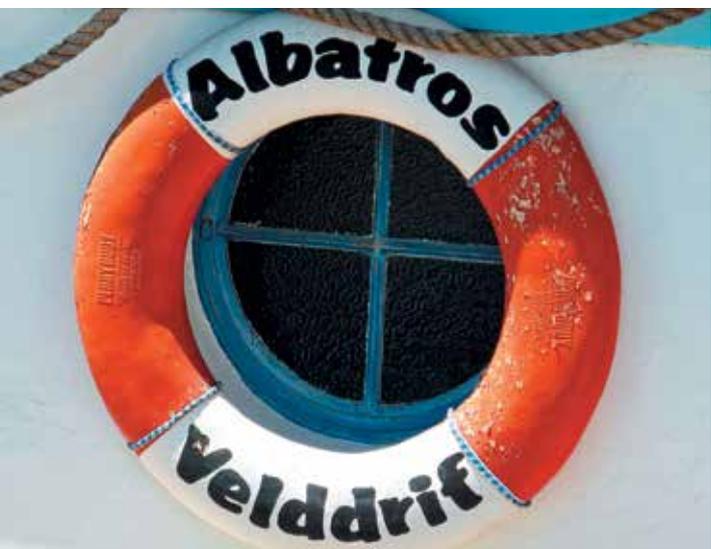
Darling is also visited for its enchanting name. So it might come as a disappointment that the town is simply named after a British governor from the mid 1800s, Charles Henry Darling, who couldn't possibly have imagined what curiosity the town's name would stir.

Similar is Hopefield, about 40km inland from Paternoster. It's named after the two men who laid out the village: Major William Hope and a certain Mr Field. In his garden, André has the anchor of the Hopefield Packet, the ship that sank off the West Coast, and many people believe the town was named after the vessel.

While this method of naming is often true, it works the other way round and ships

are frequently named after places. Like Hondeklipbaai for instance, way up the West Coast about 500km north of Paternoster.

"Recently, somebody explained to me that he knew the origin of Hondeklipbaai's name," says André. "He said it was because a ship called the Hondeklip sank there. But the bay was named more than a century before the ship sank, so the ship was named after the town, which was named after a rock that looks like a dog." It doesn't look as much like a dog anymore, since the rock was struck by lightning and a piece of the dog fell off. But if you look carefully from a certain angle you will still see a stone dog, the 'honde klip'.



“Right here around Paternoster are many rocks and tiny bays named by and known to local fishermen, who use them as markers when out at sea,” adds André. “Ou Miesies (old lady) is a rock that looks just like an old lady with bad Cooper’s droop. Another is Die Klaskamer (the classroom), a rock always covered with birds. It looks like they are having a school lesson and are paying close attention. Die Bul (bull) looks like a whale, because on the West Coast whales are called *bulle* or *klippe* (stones/boulders). Die Osse (oxen) is a group of rocks that resembles these animals swimming. A ship carrying oxen sank there and these stone ‘oxen’ are still trying to make it to shore.”

André’s favourite is a rock called Suiker en Brood (sugar and bread), also near Paternoster. “There are always fish there,” he says, “so I imagine the name could be because of that. And when you sell your catch you can then buy sugar and bread.”

Local fishermen named Koeltebaai near Paternoster for a dune that shades the bay

TOP LEFT: The white Carinus Bridge replaced the ‘drif’ of Velddrif, so the town is now accessible regardless of the Berg River’s water level. ABOVE LEFT: The town of Velddrif’s name makes no sense at all, until you know how the name came about. ABOVE RIGHT: Today the harbour at Laaiplek is where fish is offloaded, but in the past it was all about wheat.

until late morning, so it’s always cooler than anywhere else in the vicinity. Also close to Paternoster is Die Kombuis (kitchen). “It’s literally a sea kitchen,” says André. “Even in bad weather, this little bay is protected and you can collect mussels and *perdevoete* (limpets) to eat.”

On the subject of food, André leans against the wall of his sunny stoep and asks: “Do you know where the Jacopower fish got its name? There was a legendary Dutch captain of old called Jacob Everson. He liked the bottle a little too much and had a bright red face as a result. The same colour red as the skin of this fish, which locals named after him and gave a West Coast dialect twist.” Jacopower is also easier to say than *Helicolenus dactylopterus*, and its other

name – blackbelly rosefish – is unknown to West Coast fishermen.

If you hug the coast and head north from Paternoster, you’ll find Stompneusbaai – literally named for all the stumpnose fish caught there in the old days. Venture a little further along the coast to Velddrif and neighbouring Laaiplek, and the origin of their names is just as literal. “Velddrif got its name in the old days, when you got to the village by crossing a ‘drif’ or shallow section in the Berg River,” explains André. “The drif used to be just to the left of the white Carinus Bridge that you now cross to enter Velddrif. So the name simply means ‘crossing in the bush’ or *velddrif*.”

André says the opinion that Laaiplek’s name originates from fishing boats offloading their catches in the harbour, as they do today, is incorrect. Actually its name has everything to do with wheat. Long ago, flat-bottomed boats were used to transport wheat from Malmesbury and the Swartland down the Berg River, where it was reloaded onto cutters in Laaiplek to be

shipped to Mauritius and the Seychelles. The boats then came back loaded with sugar and molasses. So Laaiplek translates literally to 'loading place'. Now Laaiplek is all about fish.

"And have you heard of Sover Bay?" André asks with a smile. "It's as you leave Laaiplek and head north to Dwarskersbos. It's actually 'Soverby', as in 'like past'." And the reason? "No idea," laughs André, "it's one of those unique West Coast namings." Maybe one person gave directions to another. '*Van Laaiplek, ry jy so verby die lang, wit strand tot jy by Dwarskersbos uitkom, daar bly ons.* (From Laaiplek, you drive past the white beach until you get to Dwarskersbos, that's where we live.)' A guess, but perfectly plausible on the West Coast.

Past Soverby and about 12km from Laaiplek, a linear collection of homes denotes Dwarskersbos or 'Cross Candle Bush'. It sounds like it was

named when one fisherman gave directions for someone to cast his line, but there's a more generally accepted explanation for the origin. There's plenty of indigenous kersbos (*Euclea racemosa*) here, which might have provided shelter for travellers of old. The area is believed to have been an overnight stop for transporters, who would set up camp and position their ox wagons *dwars van die kersbosse* (across from the candle bushes) according to prevailing winds, and use the *kersbosse* to ensure maximum shelter.

While plenty of West Coast names are descriptive and humorous, André says he believes the name of a place can definitely make or break it. Places even change their names to escape negative stigmas, like Vredenburg or 'Peace Town'.

Established in 1875 with the Dutch Reformed Church to serve the farming

community, the town's original name was Twisfontein or 'Trouble Spring'. It was named for two farmers who had an ongoing feud over the only fresh water spring in the area. It's said the church often had to mediate their heated disputes and, during this process, the town's name changed to Prosesfontein or 'Process Fountain'. When agreement was finally reached and peace reigned, the town was named Vredenburg in celebration.

"One of my favourite place names is Verlorenvlei or 'Vlorenvlei' as the locals call it, near Elands Bay," says André. "From any direction it just looks so serene, and I wish every time I'm there that I had been the first person to see it. Verlorenvlei is unique because it always has fresh water and is hidden away in the reeds. Maybe it's so named because the first people who found it wanted to keep it a secret for themselves." ■



ABOVE LEFT: Many a dispute between farmers in Vredenburg is said to have been mediated by members of the church. LEFT: Far from the crowds on the Dwarskersbos village coastline.