

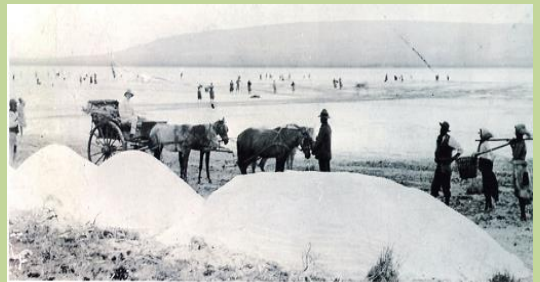
Salt pans



Sharon Brink

Salt was the first mineral to be exploited in South Africa during colonial times. Salt was used for flavouring food, curing skins and hides and preserving fish and meat. The traveller and explorer, Peter Kolbe, reported during his stay at the Cape between 1705 and 1713, the discovery of saline pans near Elim and Bredasdorp. In 1791 the VOC administration at the Cape took over ownership of these pans and leased them to prospective operators.

In the early 19th century the system of granting leases by public auction was adopted. Salt prices were fixed. This system remained unchanged after the Cape became a British colony in 1806. The growing fishing industry was one of the main markets of salt production in the Bredasdorp region. The road from the Salt pans to Gansbaai was called the *Soutpad*, the Salt road. The salt was transported with ox wagons on this route.



The Salt pan at Springfield was the largest pan and the largest producer of salt. Here, diluted brine was pumped from boreholes, wells and trenches sunk into the floor of the pan into large concentration ponds, where the liquid was allowed to concentrate into saturated brine. This saturated brine was then led into shallow crystallisation ponds to evaporate. The product was harvested after the removal of the remaining liquid.



The Springfield pan was exploited by the *Springfield Salt and Farming Company (Pty) Ltd* (1914-1950). The pan and the mineral rights were sold to Lord de Saumarez in 1950, who continued its exploitation until production ceased in the 1960s.



The remains of the concentration and crystallisation ponds, production plant (factory) and manager's (or caretaker's) homestead) are now part of the cultural heritage in the Agulhas NP.



The Salt pans today is a very good seasonal birding spot.