

Historical Background

The history of Christianity in South Africa begins early in 1488 with the arrival of Bartolomeu Dias and his two caravels at Mossel Bay.

King João (John) II of Portugal, inspired by his great-uncle, Prince Henry the Navigator, was determined to find a sea route to India via the southern tip of Africa.

In 1482 he sent Diogo Cão with two ships to survey and chart the west coast of Africa. Cão, on his first and second voyages paved the way for Bartolomeu Dias, who left Lisbon in August 1487 with two caravels of 100 tons each, and a bigger store-ship.

In December 1487 Dias sailed along the west coast of Africa as far south to a bay later known as Baia dos Tigres. He passed Cape Cross where his predecessor, Diogo Cão, had raised a cross as a beacon (padrão) and coasted southwards. After passing the Orange River mouth, Dias, tired of beating against the prevailing south-easterly winds, deliberately sailed south-westwards losing sight of the coast.

Steering eastwards he rounded the African continent without realising it. He then took a northerly course, thereby seeing land again at Rio dos Vaqueiros, known as Gourits River.

Here the waves prevented him from landing, but on 3 February 1488, the festival day of Saint Blaise, he managed to do so further on in a protected cove which he named "Aquada de São Bras" (watering place of Saint Blaise) because of the freshwater spring he found there. This was later renamed Mosselbaai by the Dutch. For several years after this the Portuguese touched at São Bras to take on fresh water and meat.

In the mid-17th century the Dutch East India Company decided to set up a station for supplies at the Cape, yet another hundred years had to pass by until a settlement at Mossel Bay was planned.

1. The Granary

The Granary was built in 1786 by the Dutch East India Company as grain and wool trades had opened up and expanded. In 1949/50 a large warehouse was erected on the site by the "Suid-Westelike Landbou Ko-op Bpk.", and the existing granary was demolished. With the demolition of the warehouse in 1986 the original foundations of the granary were discovered and a replica of the 1786 building was erected. It is now used as a reception/information centre for the museum. This museum also displays the cultural heritage of the town and district.

2. Maritime Museum

This building was erected in 1901 to serve as a grain mill and a saw mill. It has now been adapted to serve as a maritime museum, unique in its way. A life-size replica of Dias' caravel is on display together with all aspects of maritime history of early Portuguese, Dutch and English navigators.

3. Ethno-Botanical Garden And Braille Trail

This is a collection of plants that occur naturally in the Mossel Bay area and which were used by the Khoi, San, Coloured, Xhosa and European settlers for shelter, food and medicinal use as well as for magic forces and superstitious beliefs. The Braille trail makes it accessible for blind people to read, feel and smell the wonderful collection.

4. Post Office Tree And 5. Cross

In 1500 Pedro de Ataíde, Commander of one of Cabral's ships, on his return journey from the east, left a letter of importance in a shoe or iron pot under or near a large tree. In 1501 this letter was found by João da Nova, Commander of the Third East India Fleet "en route" to India. In this way the first Post Office in South Africa was founded. The large tree, a Milk

For more information, contact:

Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport
Directorate Museums, Heritage
and Geographical Names
Tel 021 483 5959 or
Email: Ceoheritage@westerncape.gov.za

www.westerncape.gov.za

Famous 500 year old Post Office tree
Life-size replica of the Dias Caravel
Shell Museum & Aquarium
Cultural Museum
Ethno botanical Garden

Open all year round except Christmas & Good Friday

Hours:

Monday - Friday 09:00 - 16:45
Weekend & Public Holidays 09:00 - 15:45
Tel: +27 (0)44 691 1067
Fax: +27 (0)44 691 1915
E-mail: info@diasmuseum.co.za

www.diasmuseum.co.za



The Granary



Maritime Museum



**Western Cape
Government**

Cultural Affairs and Sport



Braille Trail



Ethno-Botanical Garden



Post Office Tree



Munrohoek

wood (*Siderolxylon interme*) has been declared a provincial heritage site and is generally known as the Post Office Tree. Any mail posted in the shoe under the tree gets the special post office tree frank.

Da Nova was so grateful for the Ataide's timely warning that he erected a small stone hermitage to be used for religious purposes. This was the first religious building erected in South Africa. The wooden cross stands where it is thought the Chapel of hermitage was built.

6. Shell Museum (Shirley Building)

This structure was erected in 1902 next to the Post Office Tree as an extension of the Old Mill. The building is still in a very good state of repair, and the solid wooden pillars render a special character to this edifice. The museum houses imaginative shell exhibitions and portrays for instance the history of the use of shells by man. Live animals are displayed in their natural habitat in aquarium

7. The Fountain

The fountain of fresh water was called "Aquada de São Bras" (watering place of Saint Blaise) by Dias. To this day the water flows over a rock face into a little dam as described by Gaspar Correa in 1512.

8. Munrohoek

This group of houses at Munro's Bay was built by Alexander Munro ca. 1830 and are recognised as some of the oldest houses in Mossel Bay.

9. Malay Graves

It is believed that one of the graves belongs to an important Muslim dignitary who died at sea and was buried here in the 19th century. The graves face Mecca.

10. The Padrão

Vasco Da Gama erected a padrão (stone cross) here in 1497. This is a replica of that cross, donated by the Portuguese government in 1968.

11. Field Garden

The valley and beach adjacent to the museum complex is today known as Munro's Bay. This area is a natural garden that preserves the original vegetation of the Mossel Bay area. Milk wood and wild olive are the most common tree species to be seen. This peaceful environment offers magnificent views of the Bay and site where Dias landed over 500 years ago.



**Western Cape
Government**

Cultural Affairs and Sport



Bartolomeu Dias Museum Complex
The place where culture and nature meet!