

Nicolas Louis de la Caille
TRAVELS AT THE CAPE
1751-53

An annotated translation of
Journal historique du voyage fait au Cap de Bonne-Espérance
into which has been interpolated relevant passages from
Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences

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be almost all gathered together on the Table, which was then covered with a mass of very white but very dense clouds: the wind was then blowing violently at the town and in the roads. During the night I observed that this large cloud covering the Table dissipated itself little by little, and that the wind took some portions of it away towards the North-West, so that at 2 a. m. the thickness of the cloud had greatly decreased, and by 4 a. m. hardly any of it was left: the wind ceased to be violent, and blew only moderately during the rest of the morning, the barometer standing always at 28 inches and 3 lines. I observed also that a similar mass of clouds also formed on the Hottentot-Holland mountains, from Hanglip onwards; but these mountains did not remain covered so long as did those of the Table. All the sky not in the direction of the mountains remained perfectly clear.

November 20. M. Grevenbroek, Secretary of the Council of Justice [sic: de Grevenbroek was Secretary of the Council of Policy — see the Index] at the beginning of the century, and an exceptionally intelligent person, made certain studies into the manners and customs of the Hottentots. After his death his papers were handed over to Kolbe [sic: he was alive in 1713 when Kolb left the Cape — see the Index], who put them together without understanding or good sense, according to the unanimous opinion of the most intelligent people here, and especially of the Governor, of M. Grand-Pré* [de Grand-Preez] and M. Dessin*.

December 6. At M. Dessin's house I saw the horn of a rhinoceros, 26 inches long from the point to near the root, which may have measured another 8 or 9 inches. The horn of the rhinoceros is of exactly the same nature as that of a bull. It is composed of whitish fibres, which can be easily removed in shavings or splinters.

OE. When M. l'Abbé de la Caille wrote this, no rhinoceros had yet been seen in France. Those exhibited there later were given so much publicity, and were the source of so many observations that his further remarks on this subject would be superfluous here.

At the end of this month and the beginning of the next several very large elephants came as far as the [Great] Berg River.

OE. M. de la Caille brought from the Cape the tusk of a young elephant, three feet long. The person who gave it to him told him how such are hunted [lengthy story omitted — inserted by the French editor and justly ridiculed by Mentzel (122ff)].

I saw also the head of a hippopotamus, of an incredible size, so that it was almost too much for two men to carry, although it was dry.

Thevenst thus describes the hippopotamus, in his 'Voyages', Part 2, Chapter 7 [omitted].

1752, January 7. I ate almost ripe white grapes from a trellised vine, and again in the same year on December 23.

January 17. I ate a penguin-egg. They are about thrice the size of a hen's

egg, and rounder in shape. The whites, even when the eggs are hard-boiled, are a transparent blue and resemble a jelly. These are very good to eat, and incomparably better than those of hen's eggs, but the yolks have a muddy taste. The shells are entirely white, except that some have blue patches on them.

OE., The penguin is a sort of bird which stands erect on its feet. The wings have no feathers, and hang down like sleeves, striped and cross-striped with white. It does not fly, and lives apart from all other birds. There is in it something of man, of bird, and of fish.

February. During this month almost everyone was sick of heavy head-colds, and there were a considerable number of inflammations of the chest, and of catarrhs.

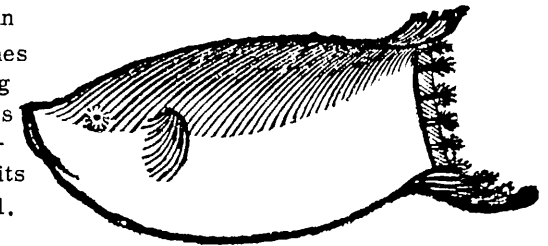
February 21. At 12.30 p. m. the temperature rose to 35 degrees, measured by the alcohol-thermometer* of M. de Réaumur [42 degrees Centigrade].

April 8. The hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Dutch colony at the Cape was celebrated. The senior officers of the French, English and Danish ships were invited to a great banquet, together with the principal of the townfolk and the Captains of the Dutch ships. At midday a salute was fired by the shore-batteries and all the ships.

April 23. I found a fish thrown up on the shore: I had already seen a similar one stuffed and kept as a curiosity in the collection of M. Reinius*, Captain of the garrison; but I was unable to take this one from the shore as it was already full of worms. I made an exact drawing of it. It was $19\frac{1}{2}$ inches long from mouth to tail, not including the sort of cartilage which forms this latter. Its greatest width was $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, its body $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and its tail $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Its mouth is vertical.

There are four fins only, two at the ends of the tail, and one on each side where the ears would be if it had any such. The tail is a cartilage made up of long fibres strengthened from place to place by crossbars which end like quills: it is less than an inch wide. The skin is very tough, resembling polished shark-skin, and is white on the belly and on all the area left unshaded in my sketch, but is covered with grey patches on the back. The thickness of this fish is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. I saw other such later which had black lines running in curves from the eyes towards the belly. They are called 'S'ea-S'uns'.

May 19. I went to Drakenstein. We first passed through the Tiger Mountains by the valley in the centre of them which runs from North-West to South-East, and from there over fairly flat ground to Drakenstein. This is a very extensive valley both as regards length and width, and runs from



— carrots, turnips, etc — in the season when they are most numerous, is a local double-sou [dubbeltje] which equals four French sous; and at that the bunches are pretty small, hardly enough to make a poor plateful.

(5) It may well be said that the winter is the good season at the Cape, since not only is it never cold enough for heating to be necessary, but there are often six, seven or eight successive fine days without wind or unpleasant heat, like the best days of September in France. It is true that at times there is also wind, rain, fog and cloudy weather for five or six successive days, but these changes are not sudden as in France, that is to say that the weather remains pretty constant during several days on end, whether fine or bad, and it can be said that the bad weather is well repaid by the fine weather that follows it. On the other hand, in summer there is either a violent cold wind which keeps you from going out and forces you to shut up doors and windows and stay inside, or else there is a disagreeable heat which does not allow you to expose yourself to the air until late in the evening. The winter at the Cape is inconvenient only to travellers, because of the rivers.

(6) The income of the inhabitants of the Cape who have settled far inland comes from the sale of their animals and of butter. Those who live at a distance of 60 to 80 leagues come to the town two or three times a year, bringing a large carotte [? misprint for baratte, churn, as in section 18 below] full of salted butter, which they sell in order to have money for the purchase of their needs. This salt butter is usually sold at the Cape for one schilling ['escalin'] the pound, approximately 12 French sous; but fresh butter is much more expensive and I have seen it fetch 32 French sous at the season when the grazing begins to be good. Salted butter from Holland is sold at the Company's stores for two schillings. It is difficult to believe that, in a country whose herds are its principal riches, butter and milk could be so dear. A little cheese is made from butter-milk, and is pretty bad; the richer inhabitants are accustomed to eat their salt butter covered with Dutch cheese, which takes away the somewhat rancid taste. It must also be admitted that milk is not commonly found even in the country properties which have the most animals, because of the difficulty found in milking the cows, much less docile than those of Europe, and the custom of leaving this task to the slaves: also the cows give less milk than in Europe. I lived for some days on a property at Groene-Kloof where there were more than 100 cattle, but where every morning the milk for the coffee had to be fetched from half a league away. At the Cape children are fed on broth, not on pap.

(7) The inhabitants of the Cape do not yet know how to get good results from the produce of their land. When they first established themselves they made experiments to find the best times to plough and manure the soil, and sow it; but they contented themselves with their success in this, and neglected the making and ageing of wine. The wine usually pressed here would be as good as our best muscatel of Frontignan or Lunel if they did not manure their wines so often, and if they knew how to make the wine and how

to handle it properly.

In order to store it they are compelled to smoke out the casks with sulphur, to such a degree that the wine becomes not only sharp-tasting but even unpleasant to drink. [Governor-]General Imhof brought out from Frankfurt a certain Serrurier, whom he thought to be a very suitable person to make the necessary investigations as regards the ageing of the wine, and even as regards the making of it; but this man knew only the methods used with the Rhine wines, and after being paid for five years from the Burgher funds he found a rich widow and married her and became a wine-merchant, without seeking out any other methods than those which he found in use here.

(8) The custom here is to carry everything on short and narrow waggons. It is true that there is no lack of oxen or even of horses to draw these; but the cost of these waggons makes this mode of transport very expensive. A waggon rarely costs less than 100 Dutch dollars, and many cost more than 140; and when those who use them live far from the Cape beyond the Great Mountains a waggon does not make many trips because of the many rocks which throw it rudely about, and also of the speed at which the oxen often draw the waggons.

(9) It is however necessary to make a great number of trips to the Cape, especially to deliver the wheat, and as a result there is so little profit in wheat-farming at a distance, that beyond a certain limit only cattle-farms can be set up. Nevertheless on most of the farms there are a large number of horses which graze in large herds all the year, and are used only to tread out the grain after the harvest, or a few to draw the harrow after the sowing. No one has had the idea, or the courage, to begin to load them with sacks of wheat for sending to the Cape, which could be done without expense and would spare the waggons. Further however, the sacks used here are hardly suitable to suggest this idea, since they are very wide and short.

(10) Most of the inhabitants of the country make very bad bread from the best grain in the world. This is partly the fault of their mills, whether worked by hand, wind, or water; they only half-grind the grain, and many hardly remove the husk, and the bran is never properly separated from the flour. Furthermore, they rarely make their bread properly, so that it is dark, heavy and greasy, and in many places the grains of wheat in it can be counted. Masters and slaves eat the same bread, although there are a few of the farmers who make good bread for their own table.

(11) The wild beasts are very far from the Cape today. Within the area enclosed by the chain of mountains that runs from the eastern entrance of the False Bay to beyond the Bay of St Helena there is little game to be found. There are no elephants, nor lions, nor elands, nor zebras, nor quaggas. However in the months of December and January a few elephants come as far as the Berg River because the western part of the Cape is extremely dry. If a lion were to be found within the area I have named, it would cause a general panic.

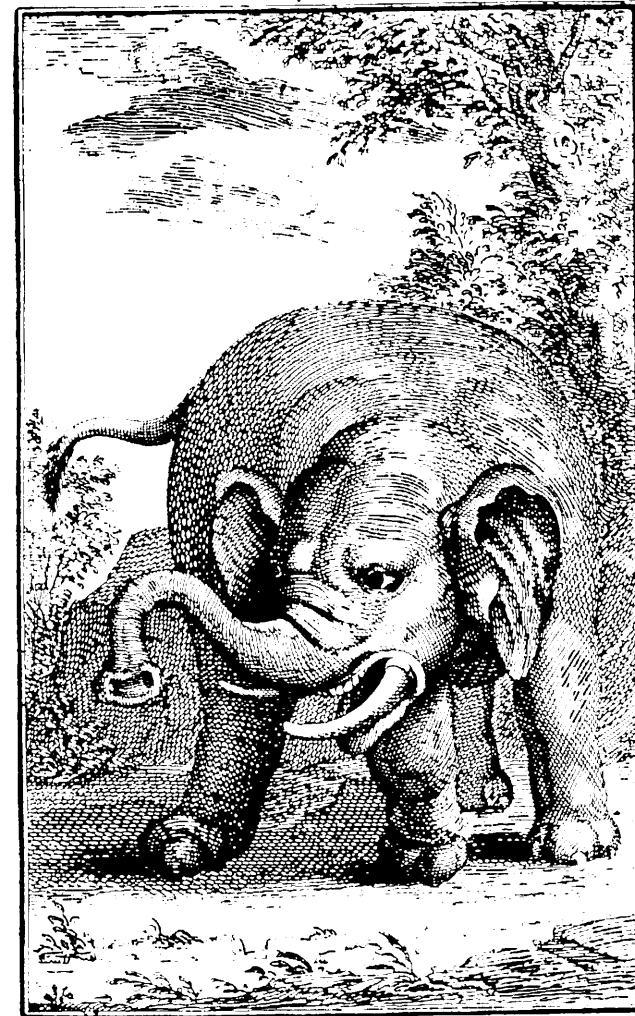
The wild beasts to be found in the furthest districts of the Dutch lands

attack no one, and flee even at the sight of a man, unless taken by surprise: for this reason when travellers come to the banks of the rivers, the places where these beasts are most usually to be found, both for the sake of the water and because these banks are best covered with trees and high bushes, they always crack their whips or fire their muskets. Then if any lion, tiger or elephant is thereabout it is alerted and goes off. There are few large tigers but many small ones, most of them mere tiger-cats. The animals which do most damage to the inhabitants are the wolves, the tigers, the wild dogs, and the foxes called 'Jacals'. When a wolf gets into a sheep-pen these are so alarmed that they run into a corner, all close together and then clambering up onto one another in such a way that for each sheep killed by the wolf there are at times 30 or 40 smothered to death: the same is the case with the tigers. The jackals rarely attack any but the lambs. The wild dogs hunt only by day, and if they find a flock of sheep, and if the herdsman is asleep or does not see them and chase them away, they fall on the poor beasts and kill very many of them in a few minutes. The wolves sometimes attack the young cattle and horses: they always carry off a good part of the tail of an ox, but unless this is young, sick, or too weakened from the lack of fodder given by the land in the months of January and February, the wolf rarely kills it. The lion usually crawls along between the bushes and comes quietly until an ox is in reach, and then fells it with one stroke of its paw and carries it off on its back with no part of it touching the earth: at times it leaps into the kraals and throws an ox out over the walls.

(12) The commonest game near the town, besides various sea-birds and ducks, are the stags [Hartebeest], which differ from those of Europe in that their antlers are not branched: they are not large and curve down towards the backs. There are also great numbers of buck and roedeer, of which the commonest are the Steinbocks, and the Rebocks: also earth-pigs [Anteaters], porcupines, and two or three kinds of hares. Among the birds there are the ostriches, found in very great numbers, the corhans and pheasants, the partridges, the quails; but all these are at best only suitable for boiling. Also there are the wild pigeons, best when roasted, the peacocks, the wild ducks and geese. The marmots [dassies] are also eaten, and the hills are covered with these; but in general, with the exception of the Steinbocks, the game is not tasty. The same is true of the fish, of which there are barely four good sorts, the best being the Steinbrass: moreover very few are caught in the Table Bay.

(13) There are no parrots near the Cape. There is a sort of monkey called baboons, which are very common in large numbers on the hills. They let no-one come near them, and when they see anyone coming up their hills they set up a general shrieking which lasts for one or two minutes, after which nothing more is heard or seen of them. During the nine days which I spent on Riebek-Castel I saw and heard none of them except at my arrival, although all the mountain is covered with them. None are to be found in the plains or beyond their rocks: from this one way judge what should be thought

Elephant.



Babouins ou Singes qui pillent un Jardin.



of the story given by Kolbe of the baboons that come to steal the provisions of travellers. It is true that I also heard that at times they come to raid the gardens lying at the foot of the mountains, that they post sentries, and that they throw the stolen fruits one to another; but even supposing that all this is entirely true, the other marvellous details added [? what and where] are purely imaginary. For the rest they are as a rule quite large, so that when erect on their hind feet their head comes as high as the face of an ordinary man. Some farmers in the country keep them chained to a post, but never set them free. When anything is thrown to them such as bread or fruits or vegetables suitable for salads, they seize them with extraordinary avidity, and after breaking them up with their fore-paws and grinding them up roughly with their teeth without chewing them, they stow them between their molars and their cheeks, stuffing out these as larders; and when they have gathered up as much as they can they set to work to chew up what they have in store, quietly and by small mouthfulls, pressing their cheeks with their paws to get the food out from them, or pushing them against the near-by shoulder.

(14) The wine which is sold in Europe as 'of Constantia' in such large quantities must be heavily adulterated. There are only two adjacent properties at Constantia where the true wine grows, and in the best years these two properties together cannot yield more than 60 leggers* ['leccres'] of red wine and 80 or 90 of white, the legger containing about 600 Paris pints: in an average year one can reckon with 120 leggers in all.

(15) One of the great inconveniences of the Cape for those who wish to hunt on horseback, or to cross the plains away from the roads, is caused by the long tunnels made by the moles under the sand. Your horse stumbles at every moment, sometimes with one foot, sometimes with another, and even with two at once up to the knees. If you are afoot, you fall similarly. The moles are very large, the size of a four-month-old cat, whereas in France they are no larger than a new-born kitten. Greyhounds are quite useless here.

(16) What is to be read in Kolbe or in the extracts or translations from him regarding the method of catching the elands is true. [sic: fullstop wrongly inserted here] As regards the Steinbock which often comes into the vineyards [fullstop should be here] this animal is hardly larger than an average fox, but the eland is generally larger than the largest Frisian horses: it weighs 8 to 900 pounds* and is easy to kill since it does not defend itself. A well-mounted horseman can chase it for a quarter- or half-hour: then it is so tired that it halts and lets him approach and kill it with a point-blank shot at the head. The ball must be of two or three ounces in weight, and half lead, half tin. The skin is so hard that the strongest man could not pierce it even with the best of swords.

(17) To travel in some comfort in the region to the North of the Cape or in those beyond the great mountain-chain running northward from the False Bay one must have a good stock of wine and not be miserly with it in the properties where you dine or sleep: then you will always be welcome, and

they will be glad to lend you horses, oxen, waggons, guides, etc. Otherwise you would be ill-received and scantily entertained: wine, brandy or arrack, and tobacco are the best passports that you can have here.

(18) The Europeans at the Cape, lazy as they are by nature, do not take the trouble to make their butter as is done in Europe. As soon as the milk has been got they put it in a large churn — ['baratte'], waiting for two or three days until this is about half full. Then they beat the milk with no more to-do, so that the best Cape butter is less esteemed than that which comes from Europe. [See 'Butter' in Index for Mentzel's remarks.]

(19) Very bad beer is brewed at the Cape, whether from ignorance, from laziness, or because spoilt hops are used, since only those are used which come from Holland. The richer inhabitants buy Dutch beer at 30 dollars for a hogshead of 180 average bottles, which works out at 16 French sous the bottle.

It is the custom here, and perhaps also in Holland, that at good meals you are served with beer after you have first drunk two or three glasses of wine.

(20) Vines are planted here in the valleys, and wheat on the high grounds, when the properties are near these.

(21) When this colony was first established the properties were given free of charge, each comprising about a square league of ground. The Governors having later taken to selling them [?], and even at high prices, the rule was made that those who took up new properties should pay the Company one dollar per month; and that those who wished to set up some grazing-land for their animals should be granted the land for six months at one dollar per month, or for a year at 12 dollars. Today the rule is that anyone who wishes to establish a new property must undertake to pay the Company 24 dollars a year, which are guaranteed by the property itself; and those who sell a property or a house pay to the Company the fortieth part of the sum agreed on.

(22) Antheaps are extremely common at the Cape, especially in the Swartland [Malmesbury region], where you cannot go ten yards without finding one. Some are very large: I saw some which had a base of fully four feet, and were more than two feet high. Their shape is approximately hemispherical, or often that of an elongated hemispheroid. Although made from very loose sand they are so hard that it takes much force to break them open, and a loaded waggon cannot crush one. No exit is visible. At the end of October and the beginning of November the ants add a new layer, either on the top or on one of the sides: to do this they make some holes, and cover these in with a new layer made in the form of galleries. This layer takes a long time to become as hard as the rest: it is about an inch thick. When I broke open various of these antheaps in October I found a prodigious number of ants which were still white, as also black ones, and some larger ones which had very long white wings. The anteaters ['Cochons de terre'] make a hole, about eight inches in diameter and six inches deep, in one of the

sides. When they have thus depopulated an anthill as a rule it remains deserted, but sometimes also the ants repair it.

(23) The Colony of the Cape consists actually of three Districts and six Parishes. The first district is that of the Cape, which has one parish only but in which the Council of Justice gives judgements and hears appeals. The second is that of Stellenbosch and Drakenstein, where there is a Landdrost and a Council which meets in the village of Stellenbosch: there are four parishes under it, that of Stellenbosch, that of Drakenstein, that of the Swartland, and that which lies beyond the Hills of Red Sand [those West of Tulbagh]. The third district extends over all the land beyond the great mountain-range which runs from South to North, and is called the Schwellendham [sic] from the name of M. Schwellengrebet [sic], the Governor preceding M. Tulbagh, who established there a Council composed of a Landdrost and various members.

(24) The complaints of the inhabitants of the Cape against the Government are: (1) that they are not allowed to sell their wheat to foreigners; (2) that they are not allowed to equip some coastal ships, to trade in the neighbourhood, and especially to go to seek for timber for building and furniture; (3) that the interest on the money they borrow for their needs is six per cent, with two good guarantors, and that the cost of the loans is considerably increased by the stamps on the documents and the dues payable to the Council, although the lenders have nevertheless the right to recall their money at three months' notice; (4) that although two-thirds of the inhabitants are Lutherans they are not allowed to have Pastors of this religion, the costs of whom they offer to pay themselves; (5) that Chinese banished from Batavia are allowed here, who live only from the thefts made by the slaves, buying and reselling the stolen goods.

(25) The inhabitants of the Cape have no care for the education of their slaves, who are a mixture of pagans and Moslems, with some Christians. No-one ever speaks to them of religion, and those born in this country have no idea of it, except that they see their masters coming together in the churches. Thus all the slaves are extremely given to all sorts of vice: the girls are above all the most impudently lewd, and will not marry, but after having been the playthings of the whites in their first youth they give themselves to everyone, soliciting them openly in the streets, which disorderly conduct gives rise to a great number of fights and even of assassinations caused by jealousy. This together with the abundance of wine, arrack and brandy, makes the houses rare in which there is not some uproar almost every day.

When any owner wishes to free a slave, he is baptised and becomes a citizen; but such cases are pretty rare, since the owner is obliged to hand over 500 dollars to the Church funds for the support of the black in case he becomes unable to earn a living. The reason which they allege for giving no religious teaching to their slaves, is that those of the Company are taught by catechisms given them on certain days, and are nevertheless greater