

Mid Month Visit – August 2022

This month's mid-month visit covers a trip to Dundee accompanying two overseas visitors to the Zulu War Battle Sites of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift.

However, having discovered that one of my guests was a Liverpool supporter – a visit to Natal – for a Liverpool supporter – without going to Spioen Kop – would have been sacrilege! So, my South African War (1899-1902), tour guide skills came in as a bonus.

There were hundreds of Welsh tourists who came across to South Africa for the Welsh Rugby Test Series against the Springboks, and I am not sure how many took the time to visit Rorke's Drift, where in 1881, a record number of 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded for the 'day's' defence of the British position.

Seven of those V.C.s were awarded to the 2nd Battalion, 24th Regiment of Foot, a regiment more commonly known as the South Wales Borderers which came into existence in England in 1689.

Based at Brecon from 1873, the regiment recruited men from the border counties of Brecknockshire, Monmouthshire and Herefordshire. Every Welshman worth his salt knows about Rorke's Drift and the famous 24th, and most have visited the museum at Brecon.



Although I am an accredited Tour Guide for a number of regions the Natal Battlefields are not included in my accreditation so my duty was to accompany them to Dundee, and to organise a Tour Guide for the relevant battlefields. Thereafter I had to get them back to O. R. Tambo Airport for their flight home to the U.K. David and Wendy are obviously huge rugby fans, with David having an in-depth interest in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1880-1881 – he apparently has a huge library at home covering the subject. However, after this visit, I hope that I have sparked an interest in the 'Boer War' as, much of the trip from Johannesburg to Dundee, certainly had huge 'Boer War' associations. I was able to articulate on many of the areas through which we travelled as to what happened during that conflict. And I hope Spioen Kop was the 'icing on the cake'.

Pat Rundgren was our Tour Guide and I cannot compliment him enough on what he achieved. In one day he covered not only the battles, but also cultural aspects in which David and Wendy showed a huge interest. Both agreed, when I dropped them off for their flight back home, that one day in Dundee / Natal is just not enough – the information available, the distances travelled and the sites to visit all deserve considerable time.



Our Isandlwana and Rourke's Drift Day:

The morning of the day of the battlefield visits started early, and the weather for our trip to Isandlwana was fresh with a lot of mist around. David and Wendy were very interested in the rural villages and their composition, and as I have already said, Pat did a great job explaining much of the culture, even though that was not the purpose of their visit.

I have been to Isandlwana before, but have never been to the viewing points to which Pat took us. The perspective of what happened at that Sphinx-like mountain 121 years ago was really 'brought to life'.



Picture: The Battle of Isandlwana with graves in the foreground

Although we were running late for the lunch at the Rorke's Drift Hotel, Pat indulged the moment and time that his guests needed to appreciate their experience.

There was however no time to experience a little of the terrain of Fugitive's Drift – the explanation that Pat gave had to suffice. David was well versed with the saving of the colours and I am sure that he would have appreciated a visit to where Melville and Coghill were rewarded for their act of bravery!

Our lunch and the limited time we had at the Rorke's Drift Hotel were well worth the stop. Anyone who visits the area, and who doesn't spend time at that Hotel, is really not doing the trip any justice at all.

Lunch was fantastic, the hospitality, together with all the dogs, was great, and the view of the actual drift, where 'it all happened', even better. This newsletter reaches many overseas visitors,



and I can only highly recommend a stay over at the Rorke's Drift Hotel – I am sure that David and Wendy would vouch for that.

After lunch it was off to the scene of the epic battle. Once in the grounds, and getting one's bearings from the tour guide, one can follow the events of the battle through a self-guided museum. However, having done that, one needs to sit down with someone who has a detailed insight into what happened on 22-23 January 1881 to get a true perspective of how and where it all took place.

The battle-site as it was then has changed, however, the buildings are still there, and the boundaries for the defence of the position are clearly marked out. Being a football fanatic, I related this to a battle being fought, by just over 150 British and colonial troops against an attack by over 3 000 Zulu warriors, on half a football field.



Picture: The 'hospital building' at the Battle of Rourke's Drift

By the time we got back to our accommodation, David and Wendy had achieved in one day what should really have taken two days. However, as has already been mentioned, a Liverpool supporter cannot come to Natal without a visit to Spioen Kop, so an early start was on the cards for the following day.

The Next Day:

We started off early from Dundee and as best I could, with the time at our disposal, I related the Boer War Battles of Talana, Elandsplaagte and Platrand without putting my guests to sleep. As already mentioned, David, who has a huge interest, and is widely read on the Anglo-Zulu War, really had very little appreciation of the 1899-1902 conflict.



Our visit to Spioen Kop, which Winston Churchill referred to as 'the bloodiest square mile of the war' was brief – we really only had 15 minutes on the summit, so couldn't do the self-walk, demarcated tour of the events of the battle. However, Wendy could go home and brag that she had been to the KOP.



Picture: Graves located on the top of Spioen Kop

At the farewell it was agreed that no-one could do justice to the two Zulu War sites in one day. David also said that now that he has a 'taste of the Boer War', he is going to read up about the battles. He is now on the BattleToursZA mailing list, so hopefully we can sustain the interest.

I am busy studying the Battle of Modderfontein where the South Wales Borderers were very involved. Not as interesting as the epic at Rorke's Drift, no V.C.s, and certainly no Rorke's Drift Hotel for a stop-over. But who knows the seed has been planted.

REMEMBER to keep an eye on our website (www.battletoursza.com) - for regular updates and news.

Allan Gordon