

## Mid Month Visit – December 2021

On Saturday 20 November 2021 the Magaliesberg Association for Culture and Heritage (MACH) unveiled a 'Blue Plaque' to commemorate the Battles of Silkaatsnek, which were fought in July and August 1900.

The definition from Wikipedia reads – *"A Blue Plaque is a permanent sign installed in a public place in the United Kingdom and elsewhere to commemorate a link between that location and a famous person, event, or former building on the site, serving as a historical marker."* The placement of the iconic round plaques, with white text on a blue background, began in 1866, more than 150 years ago.

MACH will be placing Blue Plaques at heritage sites throughout the greater Magaliesberg region, with the objectives being:

- to identify, support and endorse important sites in and around the Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve,
- to raise awareness of the rich heritage and culture in the region and to make information accessible to tourists, students and the public,
- to encourage research into the history of the region,
- to foster a sense of local pride and encourage the conservation of historical landmarks.

To date 11 Plaques have been unveiled, with the latest being on the top of the Magaliesberg, at the Hartbeespoort Cableway Station.



*Picture: The Upper Station of the Hartbeespoort Cableway*



The inscription reads –

*THE BATTLES OF SILKAATSNEK  
South African War 1899-1900*

*On 11 July 1900, 600 Boers under General Koos de la Rey attacked 240 British soldiers under Colonel H.R. Roberts who were camped at Silkaatsnek. The Boers attacked from the summit of the Magaliesberg east and west of the nek, and the two British field guns could not be elevated high enough to fire back at them. The defenders were trapped in the nek and surrendered at nightfall, having lost 72 men, killed or wounded. The Boers also suffered losses, but their victory was undisputed and demonstrated their resolve to continue the war.*

*In a second battle on 2 August 1900, a large force under General Ian Hamilton drove the Boers from Silkaatsnek and re-opened the road through the pass.*

Professor Ian Copley, in an article published in the 'Military History Journal' of June 2018, wrote the following about the two battles – *"The Royal Scots Greys arrived at the small kopje in the middle of the valley on 8 July 1900. They were there to relieve Baden-Powell, having marched from Derdepoort, north of Pretoria, along the north face of the Magaliesberg. A squadron was installed at each nek (Commando Nek and Silkaatsnek) and Colonel Alexander's headquarters at Rietfontein, with two 12-pounder guns of 'O' Battery, under Jervis-White-Jervis. On 11 July, from this position, they failed to render adequate support to the Lincolns, who had just arrived the night before to take over from the Greys and the RHA. Before the end of the engagement, and the surrender of the Lincolns, Colonel Alexander abandoned the camp, withdrew the Greys and RHA from Commando Nek, ran to the erstwhile relieving force, and returned with them to Pretoria.*

*On 25 July, Colonel T.E. Hickman came out from Pretoria to reconnoitre the neks with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and the 18<sup>th</sup> Battery, RFA. The Boers were noted to have a laager in the area and to be on top of the passes. As the Crocodile River was in flood, they returned to Pretoria.*

*The second battle of Silkaatsnek was fought on 2 August. General Ian Hamilton made Rietfontein his headquarters. The Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders attacked the Nek and kopje frontally, whilst the Royal Berkshire Regiment stormed the eastern buttress. Private W. House of the Berkshires was awarded the Victoria Cross for rescuing his mortally wounded sergeant. The Highlanders lost one man and the Berkshires, five, possibly the first direct internments at Rietfontein." – the cemetery at the Rietfontein Garrison, identified by Baden-Powell as having strategic military importance.*



*Picture: British Guns taken at the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of Silkaatsnek*

After the unveiling of the Plaque at the base station of the Cableway, and an excellent presentation given by Andre Wedepohl, those who were interested, made their way to the summit, via cable-car. Here Andre gave a description of the battles, from a very good vantage-point, and the Plaque was left at the top Cable-station to be permanently mounted.

This is the 4<sup>th</sup> battle-site in the Magaliesberg to be 'awarded' a Plaque – the others being Kalkheuwel, Dwarsvlei, Nooitgedacht, and now the two Battles at Silkaatsnek.

**REMEMBER** to keep an eye on our website ([www.battletoursza.com](http://www.battletoursza.com)) - for regular updates and news.

**Allan Gordon**