



The History of Wemmer Pan Rowing Club



The early years (1911 to 1939)

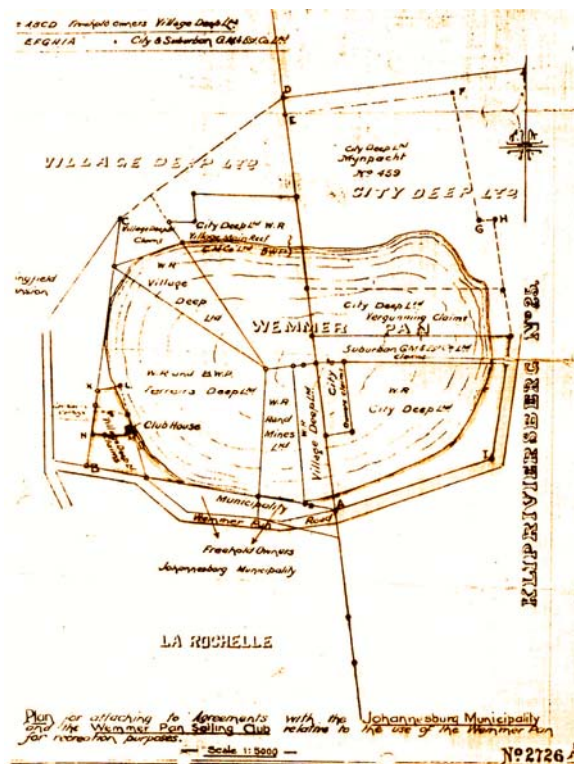
by H Juniper, Aubrey Miles, Rod MacKinnon

Establishment and administration

The Wemmer Pan was originally a brick field quarry, owned by Sam Wemmer. Ownership changed to two mining companies, Village Deep in the west and City Deep in the east, with their property boundary running north-south through the middle of the Pan.

The Pan itself was, however, subject to mining water rights held by several other companies whose names hark back into the very foundation of mining in Johannesburg: Village Deep; City Deep; City & Suburban Gold Mine & Estates Company; Rand Mines; Ferreira Deep; and Village Main Reef Gold Mining Company. Water was drawn from the Pan, which also held run-off from the slimes dams.

What is now Wemmer Pan Rowing Club was originally established as Wemmer Pan Sailing Club in 1911 by employees of Village Deep and City Deep. There were well over 100 members. Yachting races took place from the first years. In those days the dumps that surround the Pan today were non-existent and few trees were present to affect the winds. The boats used were clinker-built (ie with their hulls made of narrow, overlapping planks) and consequently heavy by today's standards, so that strong breezes were needed for good racing.



Wemmer Pan Water Rights, 1923

In those years the Club used the land under a mining surface rights permit allocated in 1913 though Village Deep, the freehold owner. No direct records remain of this period, but from reading the 1923 Notarial Agreement it appears that the Club built the caretaker's cottage - now occupied by Vikings and Wits - some time after 1913.



The original boat shed, about 1927

Members erected the first wood and iron boat house in 1922, with materials from an old change room at the Village Main Mine. Rights to use the Pan and the land were allocated under a Notarial Agreement signed on 22 June 1923. The Agreement allocated surface water use rights for 'recreation and boating purposes' together with the foreshore land. This established a base for the development of the Club. The land area was about half the current size, with the clubhouse built in the south eastern corner of it, down below where the Bridge is now. A rent of £1 per annum was payable for the land. The clubhouse site later was submerged when the dam's spillway was raised in 1961.

The Club was represented in the documents by Edgar Sheath, Vice Commodore, and Milford Cadle, Hon. Secretary. They must have put in many long hours of work to get the Agreement in place. Each of the six mining houses was required to submit a resolution of the directors and those directors were required to appear before the notarising attorney at the same time. To complicate matters Ferreira Deep had sold the piece of land to Village Deep, requiring additional work to cancel the 1913 surface rights permit and institute a process for its replacement. The surface rights permit was eventually reinstated in 1960 after 3 years of administrative work by the Club under Jim Rogers' drive as Chair.



A crew docking in the early 1930s

The Transvaal Rowing Association (TRA) was formed in 1924, mainly through the efforts of the Wemmer Pan Rowing Club, and those of C Hansen and Milford Cadle in particular. The inaugural General Meeting took place at the Germiston Lake Club on 4 April, 1924. Milford was active in the Association as Secretary for about 25 years, through to the end of the 1940s, and was also a delegate to the South African Olympic Games Council from 1926 to 1947.

According to H Juniper it appears that Milford "Pop" Cadle, and Mr Hansen were responsible for the design of the original Wemmer Pan Rowing Club badge in the late 1920s with the design elements being inspired by Henri de Kok's sculling success together with the Club's links to the mining environment.



Wemmer Pan Shield

Competition

The rowing section was formed in 1918 or 1920 by Henri de Kok when he and some friends got hold of two old wherries, but it was not until 1922 that rowing became a competitive sport. During this year, funds were raised to purchase two old fours from Durban Rowing Club for £10. In 1924 Henri bought himself a carvel scull from an East London rower, and in 1925 the Club imported two new Phelps clinker fours. Before then only Germiston Lake Club had had fours in the Transvaal, so these brought new competition to the scene.



*Henri de Kok at the
Amsterdam Olympics,
1928*

Henri De Kok was the outstanding sculler in South Africa from 1924 to 1928. He brought the Club its first honours at the Buffalo Regatta in the Silver Sculls in 1925 (having fallen out when distracted by a spectator while in the lead in 1924) and he won three in a row, through to 1927. He was the first South African rower to represent this country at the Olympic Games, in Amsterdam in 1928. He beat Guy Glenross of Boksburg Aquatic Club in the selection race over 2 000m on the Riviera course at Vereeniging. Henri was also the first South African to compete at the Henley Royal Regatta in England, which he did as a warm-up for Amsterdam. He was by far the lightest man in both regattas and was beaten in the first round at Henley and in the repechage in Amsterdam.

During the summer of 1925, due to severe rain storms, the dam wall was partly washed away. This, added to the fast-growing slimes dumps, brought an abrupt end to sailing for the next 40 years. The yachtsmen, sensing that they would soon be closed in, joined other clubs. By 1928 the sailing section had dwindled to about three yachts, while the rowing section gathered strength.

In this period ladies boated crews with great distinction. The Club competed for the trophy of the Transvaal Ladies' Senior Fours winning it nineteen times from 1927 to 1950 (excluding the war years).

From the late 1920s the Club developed a tradition that lasted through into the 1960s of Sunday as a club day. Aubrey Miles, who started coxing in 1936, a couple of years after his brother Eddie, recalls that the day's activities included crew training for the first couple of hours, with social rowing in the tubs, sailing an old dinghy, swimming, games, sing-along's and picnics filling rest of the day.

Aubrey coxed the Club ladies' four that was unbeaten in the period from 1936 to 1939. This was a family affair, consisting of Dorothy and Margaret Cadle and the identical Payne twins, Jean and Kay.

Eddie coxed the men's four of Eddie Payne, Dave Cadle, Jimmy Bell and Colin Long, who were repeat Vaal Grand Challenge winners before the second War.

The boat house was situated on the shore in front of the present bridge and would now be half under water. It originally had a central rail system to launch the clinker sailing and rowing boats, which were extremely heavy by today's standards. It had a change room at the back, to which a cold shower was added in the 1950s.



*The unbeaten pre-War
Ladies Four, after their
1937 Buffalo victory:
Jean Payne (B) Kay
Payne, Margaret Cadle,
Dot Cadle (S), Aubrey
Miles (cox)*



*Jetties in front of the old
boat house in the 1930s*



Club members at the Vaal regatta, Easter 1938, on the Free State bank (accessed by driving over the old rail bridge). Launches ferried folk across the river. Recognised are Eddie Payne, lying down front left, Margaret Cadle, the Payne twins Jean and Kay (the undefeated ladies four '36 - '40), Fred Miles lying at the front (Aubrey's father) and standing, Colin Long.

The TRA held the first Vaal Regatta at Vereeniging in 1926. Races included: the Vaal Grand Challenge, for clinker-built sliding fours with coxswain, over 1 mile 550 yards; the Vaal Sculls, for fine skiffs over the same distance, the Ladies' Vaal Fours, for clinker-built sliding fours with coxswain over $\frac{3}{4}$ mile; Maiden Fours, fixed seats over $\frac{3}{4}$ mile; and the Ladies' Senior Whiffs over $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. The regatta was held on

Easter Sunday at Vereeniging, racing with the river current until 1947. In 1948 it moved to the Eligwa Club, with races against the current. While it was held in Vereeniging, it was followed by a Regatta Dinner at the Royal Hotel.

The Boksburg Regatta was held on New Year's Day on a curved 1 mile course on Cinderella Dam - except in the years 1930 to 1933 when poor rains and heavy pumping by ERPM reduced the dam to a mere puddle. The Kroonstad regatta was started in 1906 and was a regular fixture for the Club between the Wars.

Local competition was provided by Boksburg, Victoria Lake and Florida Lake clubs, which were established around 1906. The Union Steel Corporation started a club in Vereeniging in the 1930s, and Wits University made a stuttering start in 1926 and was formalised in 1931.



The 1937/8 Vaal Grand Challenge champions showing good orthodox style: Colin Long at stroke, Jimmy Bell, Dave Cadle and Eddie Payne in the bow. This crew narrowly lost to the Cambridge four in 1939.

