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 Geography of the District

The northern apex of nineteenth-century Natal, a triangular area of some 10,500 square kilometres, was bounded to the east by the Buffalo River, by the high watershed of the Drakensberg to the west, and by the Tugela River to the south. Two great spurs of the Drakensberg, the Karkloof-Kranskop range, striking towards the sea south of the Tugela, and the Balelesberg-Nquthu-Nkandla spur, swinging towards the south on the Zulu side of the Buffalo, encircle the district like two great arms. Within their rugged embrace lie the Tugela and Buffalo basins, undulating grassy plains, broken only by occasional koppies and dongas, and by many lesser streams draining into the two great rivers; lands unusually level in the context of Natal's normally broken topography. The two basins are divided from each other by another great, bush-covered spur on the Drakensberg. Known as the Biggarsberg, it thrusts diagonally across the district, south-east towards the tumbled gorges of the confluence of the Buffalo and Tugela, where it terminates at Msinga mountain and Job's Kop. Unfortunately, the flat terrain of the two basins, potentially so suitable for arable farming, cannot be fully utilized because of the composition of the soil and of the prevailing climate. Summers, with a relatively low rainfall and subject to blistering temperatures, are followed by a markedly dry season over the winter months. Periods of prolonged drought are uncomfortably frequent. Even during seasons of normal rainfall the small rivers fry up over winter, while, for example, during the drought in the years before the outbreak of the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879, a principal river such as the Buffalo could almost cease to flow. In consequence of these conditions, the district was far better suited to pastoral farming rather than to the cultivation of crops.

Even so, despite the covering of nutritious grasses suitable for grazing by all kinds of stock in the thornveld of the Tugela and the Buffalo river valleys up to the junction with the Blood River, as well as in the flats of the Tugela basin, the situation cannot be described as ideal. The soil is readily eroded, and owing to the dry winter conditions the carrying capacity for stock was not very high. Overgrazing can destroy the pasture altogether, or cause it to revert to hardier, but less nutritious types of veld. The southwestern parts of the northern triangle, between the thornveld and the highlands, is covered with tall grasses and is good for grazing for about eight months of the year. North of the Biggarsberg is the sour sandveld of the highlands, where the short grasses, although highly nutritious in early summer, become unpalatable as the season advanced, reducing good grazing to a five-month period. The coarse Alpine grasses on the high sloped of the Drakensberg are apparently of no value. By the 1870s little wild game survived in this part of Natal. As recently as the 1860s the plains had been covered with ostrich, buffalo, zebra, quagga and some elephant on their annual migrations down the passes of the Drakensberg, but hunters had exterminated all the larger species except for a few buffalo still haunting inaccessible wooded ravines, and a herd of 150 hartebeest preserved by the efforts of a large landowner in the south of the territory. Some species of smaller buck, as well as other game such as guinea-fowl and partridge still fairly abounded, but grass fires and the activities of poachers kept them well in check.

## White Settlement and the Division of Land

The first white settlers in the district had been the Voortrekkers, to whom the upland country beyond the Tugela (where cattle diseases were less prevalent than in the coastlands) had been among the choicest in Natal. They spread themselves thinly, for experience had taught them that on a veld that deteriorated rapidly over the winter months, large tracts of lands were essential to carry their livestock. Consequently, many of the Boer farms were enormous in size, though most contained great stretches of bare rock and stony veld fit only for goats.

Then, in August 1845, Britain annexed Natal, first administered as an autonomous district of the Cape Colony; it became after 1856 a colony in its own right. The immediate reaction of the Boers settled in the new British possession was either to pack up and move beyond the imperial orbit, or, as in the case of the Trekkers of the Drakensberg-Buffero-Tugela triangle, to deny British sovereignty. In 1847 they formed themselves into the Klip River Republic, and attempted to put themselves under the over-lordship of Mpande, the Zulu king. By the following year the unrealistic Klip River 'Rebellion' had collapsed, and the majority of Boers trekked over the Drakensberg to the Orange Free State in the wake of their brethren. Some, however, moved east into the wedge of land between the Blood and Buffalo rivers. There they obtained grazing rights from Mpande and formed their troubled and insecure little Utrecht Republic, which in 1860 eventually threw in its lot with its greater and more stable Boer neighbour the South African Republic (Transvaal).

A major reason for the Boer exodus had been the British refusal to acknowledge their land-claims, which the new government considered exorbitant. Confronted with the mass departure of the Boers and the denuding of the area of white settlers, the British administration was forced to change its stance. There was a deepening realization too that in view of the poor carrying capacity of the land trekker demands were not so unrealistic. Belatedly, therefore, some Boers were induced to remain in the area by the adoption of a revised policy of lavish land-grants that met Boer expectations in regard to the size of farms. But the residual Boers of Klip River had been left harbouring a sense of grievance against the British administration, and it was for fear of upsetting them further that the government established no Native Locations in that triangle of northern Natal where they had their farms.

During 1848-9 a Land Commission surveyed the southern part of the district, and the Boers were confirmed in 144 grants of farms of an average size of 6832 acres each. Most of these farms were fit only for grazing. In October 1848, for the purposes of administration, the Drakensberg-Buffalo-Tugela triangle was proclaimed Klip River County, and the site for an administrative, military, market, manufacturing and social centre was selected. The embryo town was proclaimed on 20 June 1850, and in the July of that year it was named Ladysmith in honour of the wife of Sir Harry Smith, the Governor of the Cape. Set in a defensible position at a ford across the Klip River and surrounded by hills, its strategic position was offset by its notoriously hot and airless summers and its cold, frosty winters. Undeterred by the rigours of its climate, Ladysmith's first storekeeper opened his doors in September 1850. Within four years there were 23 houses in the town and furrows for water. By 1878 Ladysmith contained a court-house and gaol, four places of worship, a laager, three storehouses and as many canteens, one with a notorious billiard-room. The general aspect of the place was that of a well-to-do village, its population standing at about 250 whites. Timber, nearly all-Australian gum, had grown up well and enhanced the settled atmosphere of the little community. But until the boom of the 1880s the two grew very slowly, though right from the beginning it took the shape it was long to maintain: a long broad street with a few dozen houses and other buildings straggling down its length on either side.

The Boer exodus had left Lip River County very short of white colonists. To make good this loss (and to dilute the strongly Dutch character of the County) the government proceeded to encourage English emigration. As storekeepers, traders and inn-keepers they were important for the commercial development of the County and the growth of townships such as Ladysmith. They also began, with Boers, to take up the quitrent farms granted by the government in 1857. By 1860 there were 200 surveyed farms in Klip River County, of an individual average size of just under 6,000 acres. As yet, little land had been granted north of the Biggarsberg. Most of the larger farms, of between 7,000 and 9,000 acres, were in the south, concentrated around Ladysmith.

Such was the pace of settlement and development that it began to be felt by the 1860s that for the purposes of law, order and effective administration Klip River County had become too large a unit. The government therefore decided to split the County into two Magisterial Divisions, more or less along the natural line of the Biggarsberg, and on 5 December 1862 the new northern Division of Newcastle was constituted. The seat for the magistracy was named Newcastle on 31 March 1864 in honour of the Secretary of State for Colonies, the Duke of Newcastle/ although sited on the main road north to the Transvaal, it suffered the two grave disadvantages of an uncertain water-supply and the lack of suitable building-stone or timber in the vicinity. Nevertheless, a sale of erven took place on 10 March, the first store opened in January 1865, and a court-house was rapidly built. Yet it was only in 1877, with the arrival of a British garrison to monitor events in the Transvaal that the town began to expand, and by 1878 its population (exclusive of the Military) was estimated at 150 souls. Like so many other up-country towns it was not particularly attractive, its main feature being a gridiron pattern of wide open roads, with generally corrugated-iron houses and stores loosely scattered along them. Moreover, it enjoyed the dubious fame of inflicting dreadful neuralgia on all its visitors, the sudden changes of weather to which it was subject being thought the root cause.

Accompanying the establishment of a new magisterial division and the foundation of a town came the opening up to white settlement of the land north of the Biggarsberg. By 1870 the land-survey around Newcastle was complete. However, the farms taken up were not all continuous, and considerable tracts of land remained vacant, especially along the slopes of the Drakensberg, where grazing was poor, and in areas east of Newcastle and in the Ngagane River valley where an existing large black population made purchase unattractive. Notwithstanding, the 1870s were a period of active colonization, and land companies and speculators were drawn increasingly to the area. The pattern of settlement differed between the Klip River Division, with its long established Trekker farms, and the most recent grants around Newcastle. The average size of farms in the north was only a third of those in the south, while of the 30 farms in the County as a whole of over 10,000 acres, 28 were in the Klip River Division. Land prices, by the end of the 1870s, were going up, especially near Ladysmith and the main roads, and were fetching as much as £1 an acre, though the County average was between 4 and 10s. Land companies and speculators, who held some 10% of granted land in the County, generally leased it to private graziers. Because so much Crown Land had been granted for

white purchase, and because no special provision had been made for a Native Location, blacks were finding that ungranted land for squatting was becoming exhausted. Consequently, they too were forced into the market for land, and by 1878 had purchased in their own right – especially the Khumalos in the area north of Ladysmith – 33,237 acres out of the total of 1,711,783 acres which the government had granted for sale in the County. The Berlin, Hannoverian, Swedish and Free Church of Scotland Missions were also acquiring farms on which to carry out their work, but unlike in other areas of Natal, the government failed to grant them distinctly constituted mission reserves.

Yet in the south-east apex of the Drakensberg-Buffalo-Tugela triangle, abutting the white farmland, there was one Native Location, the Umsinga Location, proclaimed in 1849. In 1874 the location, which consisted of the land at the confluence of the Buffalo and the Tugela rivers, and those parts across the Tugela contained in the angle made by the Mooi River's junction with the Tugela, was included in the newly created Umsinga Division of Weenen County. The Location made up only slightly more than a third of the Division's total area, for the balance consisted of white farms formerly in the Klip River and Newcastle Divisions. The rationale behind this arrangement was one of convenience, as was underlined in October 1879 when the boundaries of the Division were extended still further to the north-west at the request of farmers who found it a great burden to have to attend to their legal business at the distant Ladysmith or Newcastle magistracies. The Umsinga magistracy was strategically established on a well-watered site on the main road from Greytown to the interior, 144 kilometres south of Newcastle and on the frontier between the white farmland and the Umsinga Location. No township had as yet developed nearby; nor was there any other hamlet in the Division. Helpmekaar, so called because the Voortrekkers, taking the old hunting road, had combined to make a cutting for the difficult ascent to the top of the rolling escarpment north of the Umsinga magistracy – and destined to become a household-word during the Zulu War – consisted of no more than two isolated stone houses and a small chapel two kilometres away.

#### The Settler Community and its Pursuits

In 1878, on the eve of the Zulu War, the total white population of Natal north of the Tugela was still thinly spread and very small. The greatest number – 1,469 – was in the Newcastle Division, followed by 983 in Klip River and only 235 in Umsinga. Fully two-thirds of them were Dutch-speaking, the English, apart from a number of farmers, being concentrated in Ladysmith and Newcastle, or at stores and 'accommodation houses' along the rudimentary main roads. Official statistics show that there were only 40 shopkeepers and artisans in the whole of Klip River County, and almost none at all in the Umsinga Division. This is understandable, for the occupation of the vast majority of settlers was that of farmer. The Dutch farmers, most of whom who had emigrated originally from the Cape, spoke and lived in the manner of the Boers of the Orange Free State and Transvaal, with whom, of course, they were very closely connected. Although the majority, especially in the Newcastle Division, had been very poor when first they had obtained their farms, by 1878 most had become well-off and prosperous with possession of large flocks and herds, and were resident in comfortable homesteads in which durable brick and stone was fast super-seeding the original wattle and daub. Built by their own or their children's hands, their homesteads were invariably surrounded by orchards and enclosed vegetable gardens. An out-of-doors people, at home in the saddle with rifle in hand, they treasured their individuality and preferred to live at least three miles away from their nearest neighbour. None-the-less, they were unfailingly hospitable to any guest upon their farm. The general aspect of the farms belonging to the English settlers was very similar, as was their way of life. This is less to be wondered at if it is considered how similar their pursuits were to those of their Dutch neighbours with whom they had, in any case, often inter-married.

Stock-farming was the principal concern of the white land-owning community. Arable farming was not carried on to any significant extent, not merely because of the prolonged and recurring intervals of drought, and the ravages of rust and late frosts, but because the lack of convenient markets and the cost of transport discouraged the growing of grains, fruit and vegetables except for domestic consumption. Maize was the staple crop, 1,749 acres of it being under cultivation on white farms throughout the district. 419 acres of wheat were grown to supply bread for the farmer's table and to supplement mieliepap, while the 280 acres of oats was for forage. But in all only a tiny percentage of farmland was ever cultivated. It was animal husbandry that brought in the profits.

When the Voortrekkers first came into Natal they had brought with them great herds of cattle. Left to roam the natural pastures they had multiplied enormously. Then, in 1855, lung-sickness had broken out in virulent form and drastically reduced the herds, though by the 1870s they were building up again well, and were being strengthened by the introduction of new parent stock. On the eve of the Zulu War white farmers in the Klip River Division owned 16,833 head, and those in the Newcastle Division 28,952. There were only 3,700 in the broken countryside of Umsinga. The recovery of the herds had been hampered by the outbreak of red-water disease, but by 1878 this seemed to have worked itself out. Even so, those farmers who could

afford it possessed farms in the Transvaal or Orange Free State as well as in Natal, for it was the practice, especially among those living in the lowlands, to remove their livestock to the highlands during the summer months, and to bring them back to the milder and less exposed farms of Natal during the winter. But the general neglect of the provision of shelter for cattle during wet or cold weather, and the failure to grow suitable fodder for them during the dry winter months, meant that many died unnecessarily for want of proper care and provision. Runaway grass-fires also posed a persistent threat to the herds.

The ravages of lung-sickness and red-water among their cattle early induced the Dutch farmers to fit a second string to their bow. When they first trekked over the Drakensberg into Natal they had had with them flocks of woolled sheep, but these had rapidly died away under poor treatment and neglect. But with the destruction of their herds the farmers had turned once more to sheep, bringing them down from the Orange Free State and the other high regions of the interior. Considerable attention given to the steady improvement of the breed and to the study of the conditions most suitable to their healthy increase meant that by 1878 the flocks of woolled sheep on white farms numbered 41,139 in the Klip River Division, 106,100 in the Newcastle Division and 9,700 in Umsinga. But as with cattle, sheep were subject to factors militating against their increase. Diseases such as scab and blue-tongue reduced flocks, as did the depredations of wild dogs. No law as yet compelled farmers to fence their lands, and there was the constant danger of straying flocks and infection from neighbouring sheep. And as with the breeders of horned cattle, little had been achieved in providing shelter for the flocks, or in growing root-crops for fodder during the dry winter months. Nor was the wool of high quality. Want of capital and a desire for quick returns tempted most farmers to shear their flocks twice a year, which was bad for the staple. Furthermore, the washing and preparing of the wool was invariably slovenly done, if attempted at all.

By the 1870s the breeding of Angora goats was receiving increased attention by white farmers, especially in the higher districts where, requiring less care than sheep, they thrived on farms not satisfactory for sheep. In the Klip River Division 13,245 were being kept by 1878, and there were 2,784 in the Newcastle Division and some 300 in Umsinga. The Newcastle Division was singular in also carrying a great many ordinary goats on the stonier and more arid parts of the white farms.

The original Dutch settlers had possessed large troops of horses, and by the 1870s increasing care was being given to the improvement of the breed. In proportion to the size of the population the number of horses kept for riding and driving was very large, and they were also beginning to be used extensively for farm-work. (Mules, of which there were only eighteen north of the Tugela, were not yet favoured for that purpose.) In all, there were 1,585 horses in the Klip River Division, 3,218 in the Newcastle Division, and 500 in Umsinga. They were susceptible to horse-sickness, which was at its worst during February and March, and during the late summer months many were removed to the healthier higher pastures of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Farmers throughout the district kept a total of some 800 pigs for home consumption, as well as uncounted number of fowls.

The sale of wool, Angora-hair clip, as well as sheep and goat skins and cowhides, was the major source of income for white farmers north of the Tugela. But as throughout the rest of Natal, poor communications hampered the movement of goods. (And in an essentially agrarian economy such as Natal's geared to the export of its produce, good communications were vital to the prosperity of the up-country towns.) In 1878 traffic on the unpaved roads, especially in the Klip River Division, was reportedly rendering them 'much out of order'. The few road-gangs under one or two available government overseers were unequal to their task, and as soon as one section of road was repaired, another stretch became impassable. The Klip River drift at Ladysmith was said by all who used it to be the worst between Durban and the Transvaal and Zulu borders. During the 1877 punts were established at the Klip and Sundays rivers on the main road to Newcastle, but the persistently low levels of these rivers meant that by 1878 it had not yet been possible to test either punt. In the Umsinga Division there was a pontoon in operation across the Mooi River, and two on the Tugela, as well as a boat.

Ladysmith and Newcastle relied on their functions as entrepôts and forwarding agencies, especially for the Overberg trade. Both towns lived off their profitable trade in buying wool and hides from the Orange Free State and their own surrounding farming districts in Natal and transporting them to Durban, and in forwarding manufactures and agricultural produce from Natal to the Orange Free State and Transvaal. A severe depression in Natal from 1865 to 1869 had been followed by a period of exceptional expansion, initiated and stimulated by the expansion of the diamond industry in the Northern Cape. This development was a godsend for northern Natal, for the Diamond Fields opened a new and excellent market for agricultural commodities which were paid for in cash, thus in turn giving an impetus to commerce and agriculture in Natal. The increasingly lucrative Overberg trade drew more and more country-people into trading in the towns, and to taking to transport-riding. Transport-riding was a particularly attractive adjunct to ordinary farming operations (as well as being a pleasant diversion from the land) for farmers who had sufficient surplus capital to afford the cost of a wagon, and enough oxen to draw upon for the necessary span of fourteen to sixteen. It was estimated that if all went well, about three trips to the interior – with a normal load

of goods weighing about 7,000 lbs. – was sufficient to cover the initial outlay on waggon and oxen. Transport-riding was mainly carried on in the summer months when there was sufficient grazing by the road for the oxen, and rates for transport accordingly increased towards the winter. The best waggons for the task were those made in Natal itself, from hardwoods imported principally from the Cape. However, along the slopes of the Drakensberg, especially in the Newcastle Division, there was a good deal of timber, including the hardwoods necessary for waggon-making. Cutting was only by license (of which 63 were granted in 1878) but much unlawful felling was done, despite legislation and the presence of black forest-rangers. The fuel requirement of the black population made it particularly difficult to preserve woodlands, and the Resident Magistrate at Umsinga reported that the small natural forest which crowned Msinga mountain had only escaped being destroyed for firewood on account of its inaccessibility.

Waggon-building was, in the circumstance of the transport boom, a lucrative trade. But then, in a still essentially agrarian economy, there was little demand for skilled labour, since most industry was still in a primary artisan phase and needed only a few basic services such as waggon-making, black-smithing and carpentry. Yet the small number of artisans and transmen active in the district was apparently not sufficient to meet the demand for their services. The general complaint was that their scarcity enabled them to charge exorbitant prices for their services, while at the same time compelling employers to wait an inconvenient length of time for them to fulfil their contracts. What little industry of a more sophisticated nature existed was concerned with supplying the needs of an agrarian economy. By 1878 there was a wool-washing works on the Ncandu River nearby Newcastle, as well as a water-powered mill. There were five other smaller mills in the Newcastle Division, as well as three water-powered flour mills in the Klip River Division.

The real wealth of the district lay dormant underground, awaiting exploitation. In the Umsinga Division gold had been found in the 1860s at the junction of the Buffalo and Tugela, south-east of Msinga mountain, but had not as yet been proved payable. There were also in the vicinity rich specimens of lead with a fair percentage of silver. Of much greater significance, however, was the mine south-east of Elenge Mountain, yielding superior quality coal, the key to the prosperity of the future. Deposits were particularly abundant in the Newcastle Division, where coal could be seen everywhere, cropping up especially in the spruits where the super-strata had been washed away. Coal in the eastern parts of the Division was considered to be the best, and was to be found in seams 1.8 to 2.4m thick. Africans in the vicinity had long been in the habit of employing this very bituminous coal for making their fires on the ground. The Voortrekkers too had made use of these coal deposits, and farmers habitually exploited the surface outcrops for their local requirements. But already, at the time of the founding of Newcastle, the Scots emigrant, Peter Smith of Talana, was mining outcrops on his farm Dundee for sale elsewhere and by 1865 was regularly sending waggon-loads to the market at Pietermaritzburg. Experienced Cornish miners were being brought in by 1878, but even so, the mining of coal was not yet being carried out on a truly extensive scale. It was not until 1880, after the Zulu War, that the largescale geological survey essential to proper mining development was commenced. But already, before the war, there had been a widespread call for such a survey and also for the construction of a railway to the potential coalfields, as well as for the laying out of a township in the locality of Dundee. This last project was only begun in 1882, and in 1878 the future centre of the coal area was only a tiny hamlet that had sprung up near the coal deposits on the farms Dundee and Coalfields. It consisted then of no more than the farmhouses at Talana hill, two churches, an hotel, a couple of rough cottages and two stores where a few artisans had been attracted by the workings.

In a settler community such as existed north of the Tugela, with its preponderance of farmers and infant townships, in which were concentrated the majority of shopkeepers and artisans, there was little scope for men trained in the learned professions of practising the more sophisticated callings. There were only two lawyers in the whole district, both of them in Ladysmith. Newcastle, on the other hand, was in unique possession of a merchant-banker. In all the great territory of 10,500 square kilometres only six medical practitioners were active, mainly in the vicinity of the towns or the Biggarsberg. Of necessity this was still the age of the home-cure in all but the most desperate cases.

In this simple and often isolated community desire for education or intellectual improvement was generally not at a premium. Certainly, the original Dutch settlers had initially not shown over-much concern about the matter, though by the 1870s they were beginning to demonstrate more of a desire to have their children educated. But there was little opportunity locally. A very few, at great expense, had their children at school in Cape Town; while many others among the more well-to-do (especially those farming in the Klip River Division) employed domestic tutors or governesses – though through lack of suitably qualified candidates they could not afford to be particularly rigid in their selection. Otherwise, farmers had to depend either on itinerant teachers, of whom there were two in the Newcastle Division, or to send their children to Mr Wright's small boarding school for boys and girls at Dundee, attended in 1878 by only 21 pupils. Children in the towns of Ladysmith and Newcastle were only marginally better created for. A Government Day School had been established in Ladysmith, and in 1878 the Mister, James Thorrold, was teaching 53 children. Newcastle was less well-off, and Miss Moodie's Infant School instructed only 17 children. It was

strongly felt in the Newcastle Division that the government ought to establish a proper Primary School in the town, while the burgeoning Dundee community was also appealing for a school. In fact, a genuine desire for improvement did seem to exist in Newcastle (notably among the English-speaking townsmen) and the first steps to establish a leading library were to be taken in April 1879. In Umsinga there were no official educational facilities at all, though the children of several settler families received schooling at the Gordon Memorial Mission.

The cultural awareness and identity of the white settlers was better expressed through their church communities than through schools or lending libraries. There were Sunday Schools at the Anglican, Wesleyan and Lutheran churches, though these ministered mainly to blacks. In Ladysmith the great Dutch Reformed church was the focal point of a Dutch-speaking congregation of 1,500; whereas the Rev. C W Posselt's Lutheran church was attended by about 40 whites each Sunday. At the Wesleyan chapel the small white congregation of 130 was quite outnumbered by the 850 blacks. Outside Ladysmith there were Wesleyan chapels at Drie Fontein and Endumeni, which a handful of whites attended. At Newcastle there was an Anglican church under the Rev. D E Robinson, as well as a small Dutch Reformed one. The latter's minister, the Rev. A Van Velden, also had in his charge a church on the Biggarsberg, which was favoured during his occasional visitations by a farming congregation of 200. The Free Church of Scotland chapel at Dundee also managed to draw in about 60 worshippers from the surrounding farms in the Umsinga Division the scattering of whites had to share the Lutheran chapel on the mission station at Sutherland and the chapel at the Gordon Memorial Mission with a great majority of blacks. There was also the small chapel built by the Vermaaks near Helpmekaar for the Rev. Jacob Döhne, who had earlier been dismissed by the Berlin Society and rejected by his Utrecht congregation. Considering the size of the population, the number of church institutions was very high and, especially among the farming community, provided valuable services like the registration of births, marriages and deaths. The missions in particular were important as markets, and had attached to them artisans and people with some medical knowledge, such as midwifery.

### The Black Population

The white settlers, and farmers in particular, depended for their livelihood on the labour of the black population of the district. As there was no Native Location in Klip River County, almost all the blacks (who were roughly estimated from the returns of the hut-tax collection to number 28,000 in the Klip River and 11,000 in the Newcastle Divisions) lived either on the few remaining Crown Lands or on land owned by white farmers or land companies. This arrangement meant that there was no large concentration of blacks in any particular locality. Structurally too, the clans and sub-clans (many of them uprooted refugees) were very fragmented, though each had nevertheless a recognized chief or headman. Those who dwelt on white-owned farms were rent-paying tenants, supposedly furnishing – in return for being allowed to build their huts and graze their cattle – the labourers and herdsmen required by the landowner. Relations between farmers and their tenants were often uneasy. Farmers found it difficult to induce the blacks 'squattening' on their land to enter the labour market, as they were often self-sufficient. However, increasing pressure to pay the annual hut-tax of 14s. imposed by the government on each hut of an estimated four people, as well as the need to pay the farmer rent and to buy manufactured items such as metal ploughs and blankets was modifying the situation. Some blacks were beginning to sell their agricultural surpluses on the local market to satisfy these demands, but many more were finding it necessary to work for whites for at least part of the year. (By 1878 about 2,000, for example, were engaged as domestic servants in Klip River County.) Yet when they did enter the labour market, the verbal and irregular agreements customarily made between farmers and tenants (written contracts were not then normal) often led to disagreeable disputes and much litigation. Furthermore, as the blacks were not tied to the land, a farmer might find that his potential work-force had moved off to seek better conditions elsewhere or, as happened in 1878 when the crops failed in the Umsinga and parts of the Klip River Divisions, they might remove to a district where the season had proved more favourable, in this case the Newcastle Division. In the end, black tenants on white farms lived under the distrust – and to an extent the protection too – of the white proprietors. But it was doubtless attributable to this degree of supervision and involvement – which could develop into mutual loyalty and friendship between farmers and individual tenants – that blacks in Klip River County were less given to faction-fights and similar disturbances than was common elsewhere in Natal.

As traditional subsistence farmers, black tenants tended to cultivate only as much land as was required primarily to provide for their home wants, though the need to provide the tax and rent payments and for manufactured goods was becoming ever more pressing. They grew primarily mealies (in 1878 5,590 acres in the Klip River and 1,499 acres in the Newcastle Divisions) and sorghum (4,750 and 1,329 acres in the Klip River and Newcastle Divisions respectively). By 1878 they were fast learning the advantages of using the metal plough, and there were already some fears among the white farming community that their need for cash and the ready market for the limited mealie crop might spur them on to grow their own produce for sale in

competition with their white landlords. The blacks though, were essentially pastoralists, and to them ownership of cattle, and to a lesser degree smaller stock like goats, which conferred social status and enabled them to meet *lobola* obligations, took precedence over agriculture. Consequently, herds were prized more for their extent than for their exchange value, and were usually greater than the land could comfortably bear. In the Klip River Division alone black-owned herds of horned cattle amounted in 1878 to no less than 47,728 head, while there were an estimated 15,427 in the Newcastle Division. Goats, which were often an indication of relative poverty in the families that owned them (for to keep goats was to be unable to afford cattle) were also extremely numerous: 38,108 in the Klip River and 12,417 in the Newcastle Division. These were slaughtered both for food and ritual purposes. As with white farmers, horses were being used (besides Oxen) for ploughing and also for riding. They numbered 1,184 in the Klip River and only 658 in the Newcastle Divisions, in the latter case considerably less than held by the whites. The blacks also kept a singular breed of sheep, good only for eating, in which dark-brown hair was mingled with scanty wool. Most were concentrated in the Klip River Division: 5,798 as opposed to the 1,461 around Newcastle. Some 300 pigs were also to be found throughout Klip River County.

One is left ultimately with a coherent image of the pattern in Klip River County of white and black settlement, agriculture and stock-raising. Somewhat fewer whites lived in the Klip River Division, but their holdings were larger on average than in the Newcastle Division, and their agriculture production was greater than in the latter Division where, conversely, the level of herds and flocks was much higher. The blacks, on the other hand, were concentrated on the southern farms whose size allowed for a higher density of tenants. In both Divisions black agricultural produce and holdings of livestock were commensurate with the size of their population, and demonstrated the standard nature of the black economy.

The situation in Umsinga was rather different from that in Klip River County. There, the vast bulk of the black population of some 24,000 (about half of whom were children) were tightly concentrated in the Klip River and Impofana Locations that comprised only just over a third of the Division. These two locations had been gazetted on 7 April 1849, and by 1864 their boundaries had been surveyed and set. The black clans and sections of clans who lived there were very much inter-mixed and were not in separate locations, although the bulk of the respective sections were located in the vicinity of their petty chiefs. The Thembu, Mchunu, Bomvu, Mabaso, Sithole and Mangwe were concentrated in the location north of the Tugela and the Mchunu to the south. As with the blacks in the neighbouring Klip River County, they were subsistence farmers and pastoralists. Their main crops were sorghum (7,000 acres) and mealies (2,100 acres) which did less well than sorghum in the arid climate of the location, whose precipitous terrain was in any case hardly suitable for ploughing. The amount of stock kept in Umsinga by the blacks (15,000 horned cattle, 10,000 goats, 2,000 woolled sheep, 320 horses and a number of pigs) was in proportion to the population at about a third of the level maintained in Klip River County, and reflected the state of overcrowding in the location and the poor condition of the overgrazed veld. The situations had been exacerbated by a drought that had persisted since 1876 in the thornveld of the Tugela, Mooi and Buffalo river valleys. Scarcely any crops were reaped there during 1878, despite the steady improvement in black agriculture thanks to the increased use of ploughs, which had the advantage of allowing deep planting in furrows. This method, unlike the traditional one of broadcasting seed, usually ensured a greater resistance of drought conditions. But it was not proof against a drought in which even the streams had dried up. Number of blacks had been forced to leave Umsinga temporarily to procure food from other parts of Natal, or even from as far afield as the O.F.S. Some were buying grain in small quantities from white traders; while many others from the location were reduced to taking their precious cattle long distances to exchange for food (one beast for a sack of mealies was the going rate). As a consequence, the people were becoming even poorer in cattle. In these desperate circumstance it is not surprising that the rate of crime had risen significantly, and to note that its nature was chiefly assault, connected to cattle-theft and faction-fighting. Unfortunately, the inhabitants of the location had few resources besides their failed agriculture and diminishing herds. A few worked as blacksmiths, confining themselves to repairing picks and making assegais; while many women were engaged in making earthen pots, baskets or ornaments of beads. Otherwise, there was no manufacture to speak of. Commercial activity was concentrated in the hands of seven white retail traders, who provided necessary services and a market for this remote area, but who monopolized the sale of both essentials and luxuries to the blacks of the location. Their stock-in-trade comprised woollen and cotton blankets, handkerchiefs, shawls, ready-made clothing (which was being worn more every year), belts, beads, knives, tobacco, matches, pipes, sugar, slat, iron, picks, axes, sickles, ploughs, brass-buttons for ornaments, leather pouches, haversacks, looking-glass, tin panekins and hats. The favoured exchange for these goods was chiefly money or hides and it was estimated that a 'kaffir store' took in a day between ten and thirty pounds cash. The increasing acceptance of money as a means of exchange is exemplified by the purchase for cash in 1877 by the location blacks of a thousand head of cattle from Tonga traders.

In his annual report of 1878, the Resident Magistrate of the Newcastle Division much deplored 'that more cannot be done for the education of the native children.' The government took no hand, and left the

field entirely to the missionaries, who had to content with apathy and the real suspicion and hostility of traditionalist elders. In the Newcastle Division the only mission station was that at the farm Koenigsberg, near Newcastle, where the Rev. Augustus Prozesky of the Berlin Mission attempted to teach 62 black children some basic skills, and to inculcate and enforce in them western concept of 'good behaviour'. At Ladysmith, the Rev. W A Illing, rector of the Church of the Province of South Africa's Native Church of St John (with a congregation of over 800), with the aid of his sister Isabella, did his best to instruct a further 62 children and to encourage in them 'habits of cleanliness'. It was in Umsinga, where the missionaries maintained four stations, that they were most active. The most significant station was the Free Church of Scotland's Gordon Memorial Mission and Industrial Institution, located on the farms Ellsmere, just east of the Umsinga magistracy and on the edge of the location. Mr Welsh taught 49 children and a further 31 were at the Industrial Institution. The Rev. Dr. J Dalzell was in charge of the latter. He was assisted by three white and one black evangelist, and also conducted religious services at a number of open-air stations within the location. Twelve families of *Kholwas* (Europeanized Christian converts) lived on the mission land in six houses constructed of sods, wattle and daub and rough stonework. On the adjoining farm Sutherland the Hannoverian Society had also established a mission and the Rev. W A Muller administered some rudimentary education. Eight families of *Kholwas* were settled there too and dwelt in six similar upright houses, which being of a 'civilized' pattern exempted their occupants from the hut-tax. No training was offered at the German Mission at Elands' Kraal, but the Swedish missionary Otto Witt at Rorke's Drift made some attempt. Otherwise, the blacks of the Umsinga Division and Klip River County were left to their own devices and were valued only as a source of labour to farmers and income to traders and to the government.

### The Colonial Administration

The administration of the blacks and of the disparate white community (German, Norwegian and Swedish missionaries, Dutch Republicans, broad Scots and incomprehensible Yorkshire – and Cornishmen) of this vast and remote district was in the hands of an inadequate body of 27 officials employed by the government of the Colony of Natal. That government was itself a limited representative one, with an Executive and a Legislative Council operating under a Lieutenant-Governor appointed by the Queen, a position filled in 1878 by Sir Henry Bulwer. All the other important executive posts were filled by nominated officials, while of the 27 members of the Legislative Council, only 12 were elected members. The franchise was limited to white males over the age of 21, owning movable property of £50, or renting such property to the yearly value of £10. The Umsinga Division, being made up of portions of the Klip River and Newcastle Divisions and Native Location, had not a complete electoral ward within its boundaries, and consequently did not had a representative members on the Legislative Council. Klip River Division, on the other hand, had two: Gawen Mallers and John Clarke Walkton. Both had been elected in 1877, when only 58 of the 211 eligible voters had cast their ballots. The voting performance had been even worse in the Newcastle Division, where a mere 27 out of 185 electors had bothered to exercise their privilege in favour of the Division's single member, George King. However, despite the evident apathy among the electorate, some of the more influential settlers were indignant about the County's poor representation, and were eager to form a political association to counter what they saw as the undue influence of the Coast and the Capital.

The most important local officials, and the main link with the government in Pietermaritzburg, were the Resident Magistrates. Upon them devolved the routine administration of their divisions: the collection of the hut-tax and other license fees; the dealing out of justice both at their Magistracies and at regular intervals at their Branch Courts; and the general responsibility for the security and well-being of the people as a whole. Men with a developed sense of duty and responsibility, they were accordingly regarded as leaders in their local communities (even if their concern with official regulations and the due processes of the law was an irritation to rough-and-ready frontiers-men), sat on any number of committees, and were looked to for guidance in any emergency.

The Resident Magistrate in 1878 of the Klip River Division was the middle-aged William James Dunbar Moodie, who had held that particular post from February 1876. Of aristocratic lineage, and born on the Cape Eastern Frontier where he had been formed in the crucible of the Kaffir Wars, he had extensive experience as a colonial administrator. As far back as 1860 he had first been appointed a Resident Magistrate (of Lower Umkomanzi), and had been the R.M. of Alexandra County from 1865 until his appointment to Lip River. He was noted as a firm disciplinarian and a fluent linguist.

His First Clerk and Interpreter was Joseph James Field, appointed in 1874, while his Second Clerk was Henry Boast, freshly in his first official post. The clean-shaven, 28 year-old William Henry Beaumont was the Resident Magistrate of the Newcastle Division. Evidently a man of parts, this Anglo-Indian with a Sandhurst training had been the darling of Pietermaritzburg society, and had clearly made an impression within the Natal official establishment as well. Serving from 1875 as Clerk in the Governor's Office and First Clerk to the Colonial Office, in February 1878 he had been promoted directly to the post of Resident

Magistrate, leapfrogging the normal rungs of advancement – and thereby causing some resentment within the civil service. Charles Boast, Clerk to Melmoth Osborn – who had resigned as Resident Magistrate of Newcastle early in 1877 in order to join Theophilus Shepstone in the administration of the freshly-annexed Transvaal – had since that date been Acting Resident Magistrate, and certainly might have expected to be confirmed in his post. As it was, he was shifted off as Administrator of Native Law in the Ulundi Division in order to make room for Beaumont. Yet Beaumont, with an attractive wife and a baby son, and in possession of an evidently vital personality, had been rapidly establishing himself as the dynamic force in his Division. Even his extreme Englishness and lack of either Dutch or Zulu had not seemed to have handicapped him unduly.

James Stuart Allison, his Clerk, had been appointed in March 1878, and his Second Clerk, B. Greville, only in May of that year. So as a team they were all fresh to the area. Considerably better ensconced in his post was Henry Francis Fynn, the Resident magistrate of Umsinga. Son of the famous pioneer of 1824, he had been born and bred in Natal, was absolutely fluent in Zulu and was acknowledged in colonial circles as an authority on their customs and institutions. Among the Zulus he was known as ‘Gwalagwala’ after the red feather of the Lourie, with its connotations of royalty and heroic qualities in battle. He was also fluent in Dutch and had a good understanding of the Boers and their ways. He had entered the government’s service in 1864 as a clerk and interpreter, first of the Upper Umkomanzi and then of the Newcastle Division. In 1874, when Umsinga became a magisterial division, he had been transferred there, first as an Administrator of Native Law and then, from 1876, promoted to Resident Magistrate. His selection seems to have been a wise one, for his official reports show a degree of sympathy and insight into the lives and problems of the blacks under his jurisdiction lacking in either Moodie or Beaumont. In 1878 he was living with his wife and three young daughters at his newly-built magistracy on the sloped above the Sandspruit, about six kilometres for what was later to become the village of Pomeroy. Unlike the Resident Magistrates at Ladysmith and Newcastle, he enjoyed none of the amenities of town life. He and his family dwelt in four rooms adjoining his court-room and ‘two fine cells’.

They had for company the white constable, A. Elkington (who was in charge of six Native policemen) a couple of local traders and missionaries, and Fynn’s young Clerk and Interpreter, John Locke Knight. The son of a prominent farmer and entrepreneur who had been one of Klip River’s first two members of the Legislative Council, Knight lived in a wattle and daub thatched cottage nearby the magistracy.

The Resident Magistrates and their Clerks were assisted by a number of lesser officials in government pay. Foremost among these were the Field Cornets of the five Wards into which the Klip River Division had been divided, and of the two Wards of the Newcastle Division. They were responsible for the defence of their Wards, and could be called upon to aid the Resident Magistrate in his administrative duties. Elected to their post, they were consequently either influential or popular local figures. In 1878 the Field Cornets for the Klip River Division were C.L. Cronje, a farmer whose father had fought at Blood river; another Boer farmer, Petrus Nel; the Yorkshireman, Stephen Pike, who was both a farmer and trader; the farmer, J. Arend de Waal; and John Field who, unlike the others who had charge of the countryside, was responsible for Ladysmith itself. Michael Adendorff, of a prominent family of the Normandien area which had long been staunch supporters of the militia system, was one of the two Field Cornets of the Newcastle Division, responsible for the north-western parts and the village of Newcastle. The other was John Sutcliffe Robson, a giant bearded Scot with a soft Edinburgh accent. He was a great landowner in the Buffalo valley, a considerable entrepreneur, a pioneer of timber-growing, a Justice of the Peace, a land valuator, and commander of the Buffalo Border Guard. His Ward was the south-eastern area of the Division, which included the Buffalo frontier with Zululand. In the coming conflict, his was to be the most vital post among the Field Cornets.

There were also the ferrymen plying their craft across the Klip, Sundays, Ngagane, Buffalo and Tugela rivers, and the postmasters at Ladysmith, Sandspruit, Newcastle, Mount Prospect, Dundee and Helpmekaar. In Newcastle John Parks, the Postmaster, also fulfilled his duties as Keeper of the Prison and Officer for the Sale of Gunpowder. He had under him John Horn, the Constable, and nine Native Police. The prison consisted of four good cells, and the chief work undertaken during 1878 by his convicts was to make and harden the main street through town with ironstone gravel. Jesse Nuttley, who had his quarters in the gaol, was both Keeper of the Prison and Gunpowder Officer for Ladysmith. His police-force consisted of Michael Mulcahy and nine Native Constables. George Hyde and Charles Ward were the District Surgeons of the Klip River and Newcastle Divisions respectively. The Rev. J. Dalzell M.A. filled that post in Umsinga.

Such was the rudimentary administrative structure of the district. It often exercised no more than nominal control over the scattered and predominantly rural population. With so few policemen to back its authority, the colonial administration had generally to rely on moral suasion rather than force. But with the possibility of war becoming ever more certain during 1878, so the problem of maintaining order, especially over the black population, became more acute, as did that of ensuring the security of the white settlers. Special arrangement for the defence of the district had therefore to be set in train.