

The Modern Pioneers

Riverside Estates was part of the farm Vlakfontein (named after the spring on plot 37), belonging to a Mrs Erasmus who, through the estate agents "Eland Estates" subdivided the farm into a minimum size of 25 morgen plots in 1963. Eric and Sandy Peacock and Johan and Jaqueline van Heerden were among the first to purchase properties in 1964 and 1963 respectively. The properties were selling for R5,000, with R100 deposit, the balance interest free for the first five years and at 6% per annum to pay the rest. Plot 3 (50 morgen) was for sale at R3,500, but no one wanted it as water could not be found. Also living here at the time with a Portuguese companion, was a Mr. Mackridge, who supplied building materials. Mackridge advertised and found a woman through "the Hitching Post" in the Farmers Weekly, but then fell out with his friend over the woman, who was said to have such large breasts that she had to avoid travelling over the bad roads of the time.

Access to the Valley was via Friday's Farm from Johannesburg and through Kalkheuveld to Pretoria, with the tar-road ending at the present R28. Electricity was installed in 1972 and also a party telephone line. Gordon Vorster was said to charm the exchange operator in Broederstroom with chocolates, etc. to get preferential rights (on the phone) over his neighbours. A bag of cement was 37c in those days, explaining some of the elaborate stone work done on the first properties. This slowed when the price went to 50c. The Winsome Valley Road was built in 1967 after negotiations ending in a deal that the Provincial Administration and the landowners would split the cost 50/50, which eventually cost the landowners R400.

When the van Heerdens and Peacocks arrived, the area had been stripped of trees to burn dolomite for lime to build the Union Buildings in Pretoria. All wildlife had already been decimated, but they remember seeing many blue crane, secretary birds and black korhaan, which no longer occur. Finding good bore-holes was the essential problem of the time, with the households relying on two main springs (no longer running), hand carried, for their requirements.

Both families embarked on an olive growing venture, which failed when veldt-fires destroyed the trees. For the next two decades, some farming, livestock and crops, developed, but life was fairly peaceful until the arrival of the suburban refugees and "new projects", with an emphasis on nature and conservancies. As the van Heerden's and Peacock's nostalgia for those early years turns to trepidation at the speeding Pajeros, the approaching lights of Johannesburg and the "projects", may we wish that at least the latest, the Oori Nature Reserve project will mitigate some of the lost atmosphere that once occurred here.