



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 4 May 2016

EMBARGO: Immediate

Centenary celebration of the Concrete Bridge

Knysna Municipality and the Knysna Historical Society celebrated the centenary of The Concrete Bridge on Wednesday 4 May.

According to Executive Mayor Georlene Wolmarans, travelling to Knysna hasn't always been as easy as it is today. "The routes to Knysna used to be long and challenging, even treacherous. I am always amazed when I hear the stories of Knysna's past. The unveiling of this plaque stands as testimony to the trials and tribulations our town, visitors and travellers had to overcome to make Knysna what it is today - a place of pristine beauty and limitless opportunity."

"The Concrete Bridge is a perfect example of the human spirit conquering obstacles. The flood that destroyed it reminds us of the fleeting nature of our efforts in the face of frightening powers beyond our control. Abstractly speaking, this could be the bridging of the divide between rich and poor, the educated and uneducated, the employed and the jobless, the centre and the fringe."

"Knysna is making concerted efforts to address these gaps by building many types of new bridges. KnysnaON, the fibre-optic broadband internet connection, is one of the most important. This cyber bridge on the information highway promises to bring many opportunities and possibilities to our town, like job creation, access to information, opportunities for further education and business stimulation. Like the bridging of rivers during centuries past brought trade and commerce to our town, so will KnysnaON."

It is also with keen interest that the municipality keeps abreast of the efforts by members of our community to get the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe chugging again. This includes petitioning for the repair of damage done to the railway bridges in floods almost a decade ago.

"I believe that the people of Knysna possess the drive and the vision to continue building these connections to and from our town, ensuring our connected, thriving future," said Wolmarans. "I thank the Knysna Historic Society for their efforts in preserving our heritage by connecting us to the past, as well as for their valued contribution in telling us about where we come from."

This concrete abutment, one of a pair, is all that remains of the so-called Concrete Bridge. It replaced the 1893 Wooden Bridge, situated on the same site on the Knysna River, which had become unsafe. The deck, of steel plate girders encased in concrete with a concrete deck, comprised eight 40 ft. spans on concrete piers and abutments, all founded on concrete piles. It was opened in October 1915 and cost £8150. The record-breaking floods of May 1916 resulted in the blockage of the bridge openings with huge trees and debris. Six of the seven spans collapsed into the river, destroying the bridge. As the earlier Wooden Bridge had been dismantled this catastrophe severed Knysna's approach from the west. Communication was re-established by river pontoon until the bridge was eventually replaced by the Westford (Red) Bridge in 1923.

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