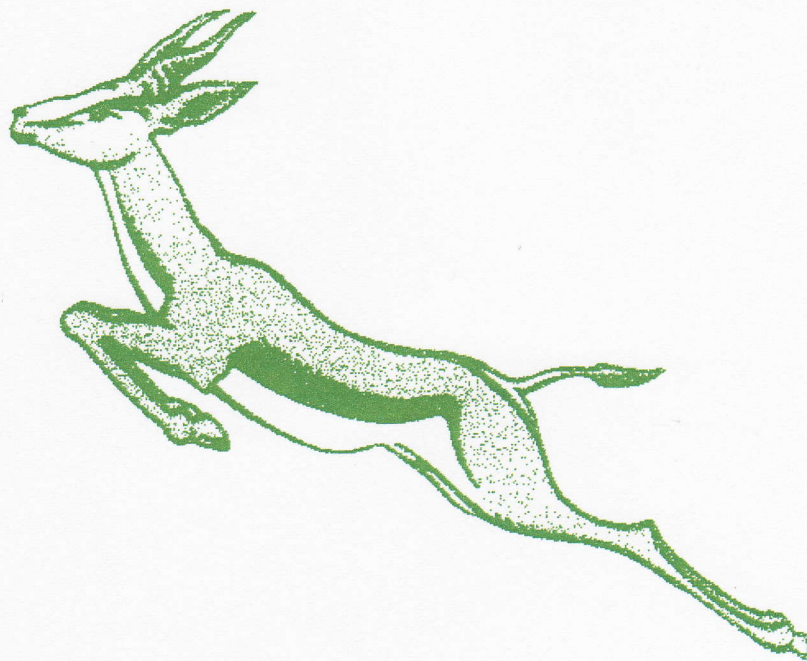


THE SPRINGBOK



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South Africa postage stamps of 1988: A unique year of major historical anniversaries

By Og Skagestad

For most countries or nations, there are certain years which are associated with significant or epoch-making events in the history of that country or nation. For example, even today - and although almost a millennium has passed since the Norman Conquest - most Englishmen would immediately recognize that there is something important about the year 1066. Likewise, many would still be able to acknowledge 1215 as the year of the Magna Charta. These are events that decisively changed the course of history. But also other, lesser historical milestones may stand out as endowed with such importance in a given nation's collective consciousness that they become the object of various remembrance ceremonies, festivals or jubilee celebrations whenever a sufficiently "round" anniversary (such as a centennial) turns up. Appropriate acknowledgement of such anniversaries frequently includes the issuing of commemorative stamps.¹

With higher or lesser degree of predictability, such anniversaries - which are highlighted with issues of commemorative stamps - may occur more or less frequently. However, when it comes to the really great, history-changing events in a nation's history, it is rather unusual to see a string of such anniversaries happening in one particular country within the span of one and the same calendar year.

But there are exceptions. A unique case in point would be South Africa and the year of 1988. Three historical events - each one of decisive importance and epoch-making magnitude - stood out as especially memorable:

- 1488:** The Portuguese seafarer Bartolomeu Dias completed the first rounding of the Cape of Good Hope and made the first landing on South African soil (at Algoa Bay).
- 1688:** The arrival in the Cape Colony of the French Huguenot settlers.
- 1838:** "The Great Trek": The epic migration of the Boers (the Afrikaner "Voortrekkers") into the sub-continent's wild and unknown interior.

The 500th Anniversary of the Discovery of the Cape by Bartolomeu Dias

Bartolomeu Dias was one of the truly Great Explorers in the Age of Great Discoveries. His adventurous 1488 voyage around the Cape of Good Hope (which Dias himself originally named "the Cape of Storms") was to become one of the epoch-making expeditions of the entire world history, - an accomplishment of the same level as those of Columbus and Magelhães. Dias's expedition was the precursor of Vasco da Gama's subsequent (1498) discovery of the sea route to India, it opened up for new trade routes between Europe and the East, and was a necessary precondition for the eventual European colonisation of Southern Africa. In South Africa, the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Dias's achievement took form of a "National Festival" which also - naturally - included the issuing of commemorative postage stamps.

Thus, on 3 February 1988 the S.A. Post Office issued a series of four stamps, with face values of 16, 30, 40 and 50 cents respectively (see attached illustrations). In the South African Stamp Colour Catalogue (SACC), these stamps are listed with catalogue numbers 643, 644, 645 and 646. The 16 cent (standard letter postage) stamp shows a portrait of the Explorer himself against a background picture of the Cape, whereas the 30 cent stamp shows the "Kwaaihoek Memorial" - a monument placed on the very spot where Dias made his first landing and where he erected a stone cross (the remnants of which are now to be found in a Johannesburg museum). The ships of the Dias expedition - caravels in full sail - are depicted on the 40 cent stamp. The 50 cent stamp is a representation of the so-called "Martellis Map" - a world map drawn by the German/Florentine cartographer Henricus Martellus Germanus, showing inter alia the southern coastlines of Africa. The map was published in 1489 - merely one year after Dias had completed his expedition!

In addition to the four stamps, a miniature sheet which included the 50 cent stamp was issued for the benefit of the Philatelic Foundation (a South African charity). The sheet, which also commemorates the 150th anniversary of the city of Pietermaritzburg, has been equipped with the SACC catalogue number 646a.

And as if this was not enough, the 16 cent stamp was re-issued on 3 March in the same year with a 10 cent surcharge to assist flood victims in the Natal province. The stamps were overprinted with a text alternating in English and Afrikaans - viz. "NATAL FLOOD DISASTER" and "VLOEDRAMP NATAL" (making for continuous sê-tenant pairs). The individual stamps were given the SACC catalogue numbers 647 and 648.

¹The fact that many countries with increasing frequency also tend to issue commemorative stamps on the occasion of ever more trivial and non-significant "events", is a matter outside the scope of the present article.

Republic
of South Africa



Republiek
van Suid-Afrika

3 February 1988

500th Anniversary of Discovery of the Cape by Bartolomeu Dias



643



644



645



646



646a

Philatelic Foundation
Miniature Sheet

1 March 1988

Natal Flood Relief Fund

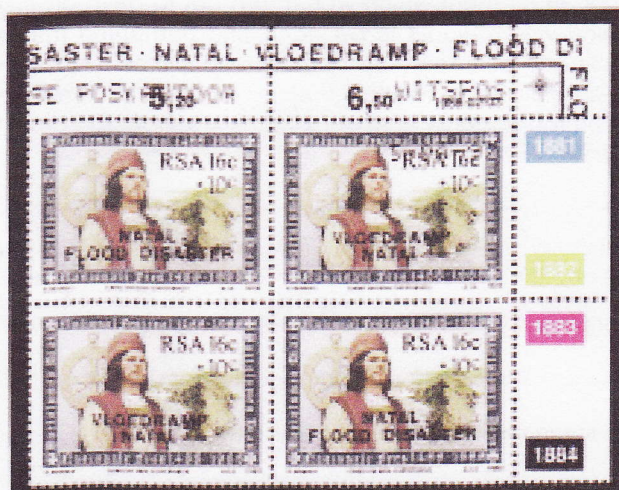
(3rd issue)

Nos. 647-648

(643 surcharged & overprinted)



647-648



647-648

The Tercentenary of the Arrival of the Huguenots at the Cape

The French **Huguenots**, who were persecuted in their homeland on account of their religious faith, arrived in the Cape Colony in 1688 in order to build a new future as farmers and colonisers on the African continent. This event was to usher in an era of extensive European colonisation on the southern tip of Africa. In the course of a few generations, the Huguenots were assimilated into the colony's mostly Dutch-speaking European population, and their numerous descendants became an important constituent element in the gradually evolving "Boer" or "Afrikaner" people². But the arrival of the Huguenot settlers was an event of great significance not only for this particular segment of the diverse population of Southern Africa. It was an event which would shape the development of the country as a whole up to the present time. Already half a century earlier, the then 250-year anniversary was seen to be an occasion well worthy of being observed by the issuing of commemorative postage stamps³. Such was also to be the case at the 300-year anniversary in 1988.

The Huguenot stamps were issued on 3 April 1988 as a series of four stamps (illustrations attached herewith), with face values of 16, 30, 40 and 50 cents (SACC catalogue numbers 650, 651, 652 and 654, respectively). The blue 16 cent stamp shows the Huguenot Monument in Franschoek (meaning "the French Corner" in Afrikaans). This is the place where the first Huguenot settlers in 1688 were given farmland – now an idyllic rural community some 40 miles to the north-east of Cape Town, in the middle of the country's prime wine district. The 30 cent stamp shows a map of France, where the regions where the settlers came from are highlighted in red colour. The 50 cent stamp is a representation of the front page of the so-called French/Dutch Bible from 1672, whereas the theme of the 50 cent stamp is the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre – the gruesome mass murder of Huguenots in France in 1572.

As in the case of the Dias anniversary stamps, a part of the Huguenot issue was also overprinted with a 10 cent surcharge for the benefit of flood victims – this time not only in the Natal province, but a subsequent country-wide flood disaster. Thus, each of the four stamps were issued as whole sheets with each stamp overprinted with a text alternating between English and Afrikaans – viz. "National Flood Disaster" and "Nasionale Vloedramp" (making for continuous sê-tenant pairs). Thus each of the four stamps got two additional SACC catalogue numbers: The 16 cent stamp nos. 654 and 655, the 30 cent stamps nos. 656 and 657, the 40 cent stamp nos. 658 and 659 and the 50 cent stamp nos. 660 and 661.

The 150th Anniversary of the Great Trek

The Great Trek is the commonly used term for the migration waves in the 1830's, when a substantial number of Boer families (later to be known as "Voortrekkers") left the British-ruled Cape Colony and ventured out into the uncharted wilderness and the unknown hinterland. Their painstakingly arduous and dangerous travels and heroic accomplishments in the face of enduring hardships including encounters with hostile indigenous tribes, were to secure a special place in the national mythology of the Boers. Above all, the narrative of the Battle of the Blood River on 16 December 1838, when 400 Boers ("Voortrekkers") held their own against an overwhelming force of 12 thousand Zulu warriors, was subsequently to be remembered as a miraculous proof of a sacred covenant between God and His "chosen" Boer people, and as a heroic high point in their history. It became a remembrance which would also serve as a building-block in the development of a national identity, to be cultivated and worshipped with great intensity as a defining element of their cultural heritage with its peculiar religious dimension. This was an element which would turn out to have divisive effects in the relations with other population groups – something which would leave deep and damaging marks in the South African society (politically, socially, economically and culturally) up to the present time. Nevertheless, in retrospect the Great Trek would appear as a history-changing and destiny-shaping event of such a magnitude that the 150th anniversary would justify the issuing of commemorative postage stamps – just as the case had been with the centenary commemoration fifty years previously⁴.

²The Cape Colony, which at the outset only included the city of Cape Town and its immediate vicinity, had been established in 1652 by the Dutch East Indian Company. The local vernacular would, however, eventually develop into a distinct indigenous variety of Dutch, which in the 20th century became known as "Afrikaans". In addition to being recognized by the Boers as their own national language ("Die Taal"), Afrikaans is also the mother tongue of millions of people from other population groups – whites as well as non-whites – in Southern Africa.

³One series of three stamps (SACC catalogue nos. 81, 82 og 83, surcharged for the Huguenot Commemorative Fund) was issued in 1939.

⁴A series of four stamps surcharged to finance the Voortrekker Memorial Fund (SACC catalogues nos. 51, 52, 53 and 54) was issued already in 1933. Two separate series of postage stamp commemorating the Voortrekkers were issued in 1938 – one series of four stamps (SACC catalogue nos. 75, 76, 77 and 78, also surcharged to finance the Voortrekker Memorial Fund), and another series of two stamps (nos. 79 and 80). It should also be noted that yet another series of three stamps relating to the Great Trek was issued in 1949 on the occasion of the inauguration of the Voortrekker memorial (SACC nos. 130, 131 and 132).

Thus, the 150th anniversary of the Great Trek was duly observed by the issuing on 21 November 1988 of a series of four stamps with face values of viz. 16, 30, 40 and 50 cents (see attached illustrations). The first stamp in the series (SACC no.687) shows a map with the main Great Trek routes which the "Voortrekkers" traveled. The theme of the 30 cent stamp (no.688) – appropriately called "Exodus" – is the departure from their old homes in the Cape Colony.

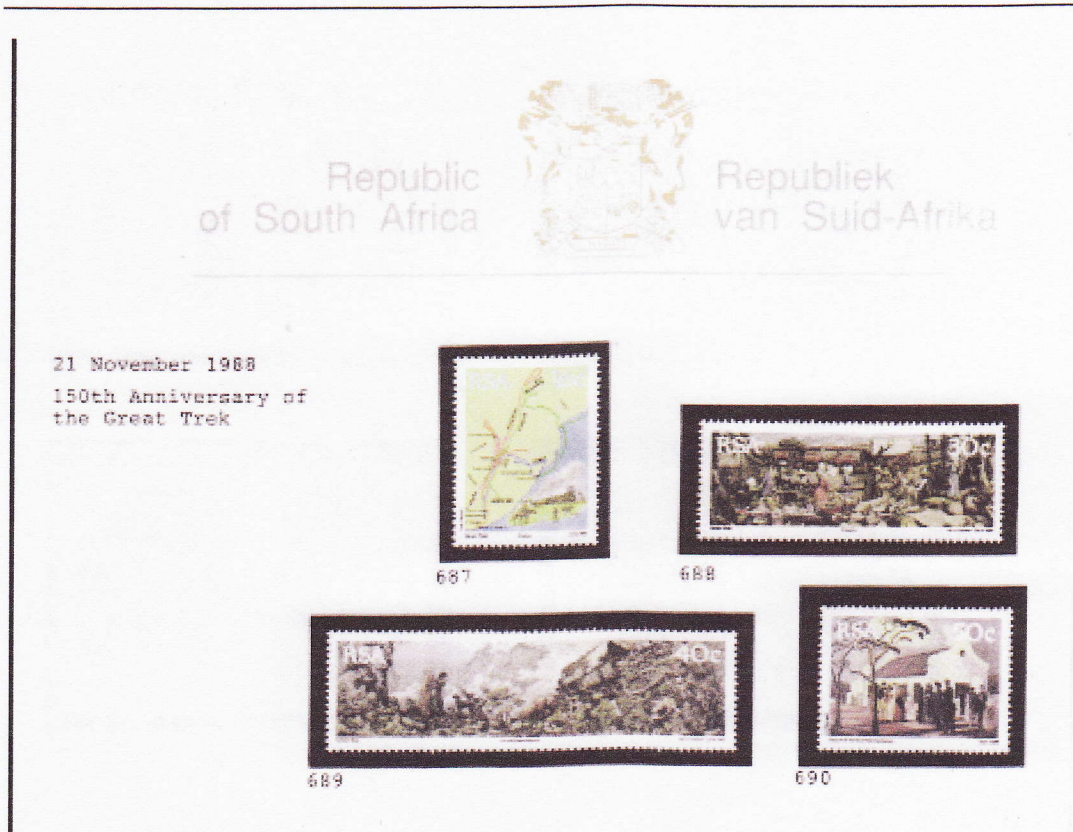
Many of the trekkers had to cross the wild Drakensberg mountain range, where the ox-wagons had to be pulled over steep abysses and across roadless mountain passes. This strenuous and dangerous endeavour is depicted on the 40 cent stamp (no.689). The 50 cent stamp (no.690) shows the artist Jacob Hendrik Pierneef's painting of "The Church of the Vow" – a church erected in Pietermaritzburg in 1841 to commemorate "the Vow", i.e. the covenant allegedly concluded in 1838 between God and His chosen people.

Epilogue

To sum up: In one single country within the span of one and the same calendar year, one can witness the issuing of three postage series to commemorate three events which had taken place viz. 500, 300 and 150 years earlier, each one of which had made a decisive turn in the wheels of history. And each one of the individual stamps could be seen to convey a message telling a part of the Great Story.

This concludes the story of major, seminal historical markers in the South African stamp year of 1988.

The story would, however, be incomplete without the mentioning of yet one more anniversary occurring in 1988 – significantly enough an event which was not to be observed or honoured with a postage stamp issue, but one which would leave its destructive and still-lasting imprint on South Africa's modern history: In 1988 the ruling National Party could celebrate their 40 years of unbroken rule of the country. The party came to power after the 1948 election, having campaigned under the slogan "Apartheid" (Afrikaans for "separateness") – a programme which was to entail a policy of systematic race discrimination and oppression of the non-white population groups. In the course of these forty years, the Boer-nationalist authorities – apparently with no great qualms - managed to issue a hefty amount of postage stamps honouring or commemorating a number of their own causes and heroes. But this particular 40-year anniversary was possibly felt to be a bit too sensitive to be celebrated in such a self-congratulatory way? Anyhow – by 1988 the National Party had already started dismantling core elements of its apartheid programme, and six years later its rule over South Africa was history. But this particular piece of history has left a baggage which the country still carries with it, and which it will struggle with and suffer under for a long time to come.



Republic
of South Africa



Republiek
van Suid-Afrika

13 April 1988

100th Anniversary of Arrival first French Huguenots at the Cape



650



651



652



653

13 April 1988

National Flood Disaster (Nos 650-653 surcharged & overprinted)



654-655



656-657



658-659



660-661