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Past Niche Tourism: The First Chapter of Mountain Tourism in South Africa

Abstract. Mountain tourism enjoys a long history in many countries, much of which is unrecorded. This paper addresses one dimension of the neglected past of recreation and tourism in the Global South. The focus is on the development of mountain tourism as a form of niche tourism in South Africa. The paper contributes to the limited international historical scholarship on niche tourism. In addition, it extends the literature in South African tourism scholarship on tourism's past, tourism history and the historical geographies of tourism. Using the limited extant literature and with primary archival sources the early development of mountain tourism in South Africa is investigated. The time period covered is from the mid-19th century to the early 1950s. Arguably, the initial origins of mountain tourism in South Africa must be situated at Table Mountain in Cape Town. The focus shifts subsequently to the growth of mountain tourism in the high Drakensberg range. Although mountain tourism is dominated by domestic visitors it is argued that the South African Railways played a vital role in exposing South Africa — and especially the Drakensberg — as a potential destination for international mountain tourists.

Keywords: mountain tourism, mountaineering, South Africa, archival research, Table Mountain, Cape Town, Drakensberg

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1. Introduction

In his chapter review of tourism histories in Africa for the recently released *Oxford Handbook of Tourism and Travel History*, Gordon Pirie (2022, p. 1) reflected that whilst tourism research in Africa has burgeoned over the past-quarter century “only a small component of this work has been historical”. In explaining why, the field is of minority concern Pirie (2022) points to the humble standing of tourism studies in African history as a whole and the strong associations of much tourism research

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in Africa with policy and management studies. Nevertheless, over recent years, at least for research on tourism in South Africa, there has been an upturn of academic interest in past tourisms. As has been observed by Rogerson and Rogerson (2021a, 2022a) one notable recent direction in South African tourism scholarship has been the rise of a body of research investigations which provide fresh insight into tourism past, tourism history and the historical geographies of tourism.

The frontiers of historical tourism research in South Africa have been explored both by local tourist historians (Grundlingh, 2006; Bickford-Smith, 2009; Dlamini, 2020) as well as the country's tourism geographers (Rogerson & Visser, 2020). Arguably, the largest concentration of this historical scholarship on tourism development in South Africa is upon urban areas and especially historical urban tourism in the country's largest cities. Within the extant literature are research studies which investigate variously, the development of urban tourism in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria, the historical development trajectory of accommodation services, the evolution of adventure, business and coastal tourism, and the forging of racialized tourism spaces as a result of the enactment of apartheid policies and legislation on tourism (Bickford-Smith, 2009; J.M. Rogerson, 2017, 2018; C.M. Rogerson, 2019, 2020; J.M. Rogerson, 2019, 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018, 2019; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Drummond et al., 2022; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Outside of cities, less attention has been directed towards the historical aspects of tourism development (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021d). Undoubtedly the leading works document the historical emergence of nature tourism in South Africa's iconic protected areas (Carruthers, 1989, 1995, 2013; Dlamini, 2020). Other rural-focussed studies explore tourism development in the apartheid-created Bantustans (Rogerson, 2022; Sixaba & Rogerson, 2023).

This paper extends the literature of historical tourism writings about South Africa by focussing on the early development of mountain tourism. Conceptually, the study is situated as a contribution to the expanding international scholarship on niche tourism. The products of niche tourism offer a counterweight to mass tourism products which involve large numbers of tourists and often occur in staged settings (Novelli, 2018). Among others Novelli (2022, p. 344) views niche tourism products as "tailored to meet the needs of specific market segments whose size and nature can vary considerably according to the demographic characteristics and the social status of the tours as well as the geography of the destinations involved". Further, it is contended that in a post-COVID-19 environment niche tourism offers more promising opportunities for more sustainable development pathways (Novelli, 2022; Novelli et al., 2022). Since the concept appeared in the late 1990s a substantial literature has accumulated around niche tourism as alternative to mainstream mass tourism

and with its potential contributions for inclusive growth (Novelli, 2005; Ali-Knight, 2010; Novelli, 2018; Pforr et al., 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021e; Novelli, 2022; Novelli et al., 2022; Rodrigues & Carvalho, 2023). The dominant focus in existing writings overwhelmingly is on contemporary and policy directed issues around niche tourism and destination development. Extant scholarship reveals a paucity of research studies which concentrate on the historical past of niche tourism and the evolution of specific niche products.

An historical examination of the evolution of one form niche tourism is therefore the contribution of this paper. Core attention is upon the under-researched past of mountain tourism and its growth in South Africa initially as an aspect of the internationalization of mountain tourism. The original geographical focus of mountain tourism is at Table Mountain in Cape Town but later shifts to the Drakensberg mountains, the highest range in South Africa. What is termed today as ‘the Maluti-Drakensberg region’ is a recognised UNESCO Heritage Site. It represents one of contemporary South Africa’s top tourism destinations with important assets of natural beauty, clean air, adventure activities, as well as a wealth of heritage assets in terms of San rock art. The next section situates the South African study as part of an international literature on mountain tourism. A brief discussion follows on research methods and sources. The analysis of the early development of mountain tourism in South Africa is then presented. The time period covered by this investigation is from the mid-19th century to the early 1950s.

2. Literature Review

Mountains are one of the major physical landforms on earth. After coastal areas mountain landscapes are the second most favoured spaces for tourist activity accounting for an estimated 15–20 percent of global tourism (Musa & Sarker, 2020). Mountain destinations with “clean air, cool climate, unique landscape, rich natural and cultural heritage are valuable resources for the tourism industry” (Apollo & Wengel, 2022a, p. 254). Traditionally, mountain areas are often economically and socially marginal spaces but recent tourism growth has reshaped the landscapes of many of these areas (Gill, 2022). It is argued that since the mid-18th century “mountain tourism development in the European Alps has transformed poor agricultural villages into prosperous mountain locations that offer various nature-based activities, including mountaineering” (Apollo & Wengel, 2022a, p. 254). As is attested by several observers, mountaineering and tourism have established a symbiotic relationship which is evidenced by the surge in popularity of the niche of adventure

tourism (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Boyes & Mackenzie, 2015; Beedie, 2021; Apollo & Andreychouk, 2022; Apollo & Wengel, 2022b).

It is stressed that mountains have been prominent destinations most especially for tourism development since the end of the Second World War (Godde et al., 2000; Higham et al., 2015; Richins et al., 2016). Alongside the march of urbanisation in the Global North mountains have emerged to become spaces of excitement, stimulation and potential adventure (Beedie & Hudson, 2003). The term “mountain tourism” encompasses a diverse span of both winter and summer activities such as hiking, trekking, winter sports, wildlife viewing, ecotourism and health tourism (Gill, 2022). Contemporary mountain tourism represents “a challenging and complex phenomenon that meets a vast range of tourist’s needs — nature, relax, sports, leisure, culture, health and wellness” (Duglio & Beltrano, 2019, p. 129). Gill (2022) points out, however, that over time the character of mountain tourism experiences has shifted markedly. Historically mountain areas often were perceived as dangerous, fearful places albeit often also as sites of cultural or spiritual significance and pilgrimage (Richins et al., 2016).

Amongst others Apollo & Wengel (2022a, p. 253) point out that throughout human history unique mountain environments have attracted people for various reasons — spiritual, strategic, military and exploration. In classical times mountains were places of worship and several cultures have been observed to develop symbolic, emotional and ancestral attachments to mountains the landscapes of which therefore hold a special significance (Higham et al., 2015). According to Musa and Sarker (2020, p. 215) in many cultures and religions mountains are “acknowledged as sacred destinations”. At various times also mountains have been considered as wild nature albeit with the rise of European Romanticism attitudes shifted and mountains now became viewed as spaces of ‘sublime nature’ (Higham et al., 2015).

It is considered the history of mountain tourism can be traced back to the Age of Discovery when early explorers opened up routes to access remote mountainous regions and resulted in the creation of destinations for tourism (Ng, 2022). Arguably, however, modern tourism to mountain spaces “began in the mid-1800s” after British climbers sought to reach the summits of the highest mountains in the European Alps” (Gill, 2022, p. 248). According to Gill (2022, p. 248) poets and artists “extolled the virtues of mountains and, facilitated by newly developed railway access, mountain tourism was born”. The assets of healthy clean air combined with medicinal spa waters and an array of outdoor leisure pursuits was a magnet for elite summer visitors who often stayed for months, in the newly developed grand resort hotels in the European Alps. Early mountaineering as recreation and sport was viewed almost exclusively as an elite activity (Apollo & Andreychouk, 2022).

In North America mountain tourism emerged in the late 19th century and accompanied the designation of National Parks as protected spaces. In common with the European experience, the role of railways was once again critical in early historical development. In Asia — the Himalayas — the growth of mountain tourism was much later beginning only in the 1950s as trekking became a popular genre of mountain tourism (Nepal & Chipeniuk, 2005; Nepal, 2011; Beedie, 2015).

Musa and Sarker (2020) note that from the 18th century visiting mountains emerged as a recreational activity as opposed to earlier years when mountain climbing was dominated often by spiritual quests. The period from 1700 to 1850 is considered to represent the beginnings of what was styled as the ‘modern mountaineering age’. The European Alps were an early geographical focus of mountain climbing as a new approach to enjoy and ‘consume’ the spirit of mountains. Mountaineers began to ascend the peaks and accept the challenge of climbing in order to be thrilled (Musa & Sarker, 2020). The mid-19th century is styled as ‘the golden era’ for mountaineering when it became fashionable to climb the highest mountains. It was also the period which witnessed the formation of the first mountaineering clubs such as the Alpine Club formed in 1858. These mountain clubs further popularized the activity of mountaineering, its spirit of adventure and of sportsmanship. In Europe mountaineering became part of a range of sports and entertainment through which the elites engaged in and popularized as a recreational pastime (Musa & Sarker, 2020). The internationalization of mountaineering beyond Europe is viewed as taking place from the 1860s to the early decades of the 20th century. During this period the geographical diffusion of mountaineering resulted in the successful conquests being undertaken in mountain regions of North America, South America, Australasia and even in Africa (Hadfield, 2020). The emergence of mountaineering in South Africa will be shown to be an integral part of this phase of the internationalization of mountaineering.

According to Gill (2022) academic interest in mountain tourism commenced in the 1980s with a focus on issues such as accessibility, growth and seasonality. Since the 1990s sustainability issues have come under the spotlight and are a prime topic for researchers (Apollo, 2017; Apollo & Andreychouk, 2020; Rogowski, 2020; Rogowski, 2021; Apollo & Andreychouk, 2022; Apollo & Wengel, 2022a, 2022b; Jeelani et al., 2023; Colasante et al., 2024). The planning and management of mountain amenity landscapes is an issue of critical concern and spotlighted for Nepal by Chipeniuk (2005), Canada by Gill and Williams (2017, 2018) and Poland by Rogowski (2017), Fidelus-Orzechowska et al., (2021) and Adach et al. (2022). The geoheritage and geotourism assets of mountain regions in Europe have been pinpointed in several investigations (Rogowski, 2016; Pijet-Migoń & Migoń, 2019; Ludwikowska-Kędzia & Wiatrak, 2020; Gałka, 2023). The advance of climate

change precipitated a host of investigations on its ramifications for mountain tourism and ski resorts (Scott, 2006; Nepal, 2011; Gilaberte-Búrdalo et al. 2014; Steiger et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2021; Cholakova & Dogramadjieva, 2023). The changing drivers, values and spend of mountain tourists, resident's attitudes, destination images and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for mountain tourism also have come under timely scrutiny (Fredman, 2008; Giachino et al., 2020; Seraphin & Dosquet, 2020; Herman et al., 2021; Ali, 2022; Rogowski, 2022; Špindler et al., 2022; Ritpanitchajchaval et al., 2023). Further, the precarity of livelihoods and disaster risk management in areas of high altitude mountaineering have attracted attention (Wilson & Dashper, 2023).

The bibliometric analysis of research on mountain tourism conducted by Ng (2022) pointed out that whilst research on mountain tourism has been developing rapidly in recent decades that this is still regarded as a new research field and our knowledge about its development still limited. It was disclosed that three major themes dominate the extant literature on mountain tourism, namely sustainable development, tourism development and management, and, mountain destinations. Leading edge issues include the impacts of climate change, the managing of destination development in mountain tourism spaces, and sustainability (Heberlein et al., 2002; Scott, 2006; Nepal, 2011; Ng, 2022; Steiger et al., 2022; Ali, 2023). The systematic review of mountain tourism research authored by Rio-Rama et al. (2019, p. 130) demonstrated that despite a long period of research coverage it remains, however, "an emergent field of study and that there are many research lines that must be studied further". Importantly, Musa and Sarker (2020, p. 216) observe of the current literature on mountaineering tourism that whilst contemporary environmental and socio-economic themes are increasingly explored knowledge about historical aspects "is scarce". One particular knowledge gap relates to the early evolution of mountain tourism in the global South in general and sub-Saharan Africa more specifically.

Turning to South Africa mountain tourism has emerged as a niche in local tourism research. Mountain tourism has attracted a number of researchers with progress evidenced on several critical fronts. It is observed that much of the initial investigations around mountain tourism were undertaken by geographers. In early scholarly contributions Visser and Kotze (2003) unpacked the issues and environmental problems surrounding road infrastructure development in opening up tourism opportunities. Works by both Schoemann (2002) and by Vrahimis and Visser (2006) pointed to the institutional barriers and the manner in which government impedes tourism development in mountain regions. Linde and Grab (2008) interrogated the challenges of tourism development and management issues for mountain tourism in the Drakensberg. The multiple policy challenges for

sustainable tourism of rock art tourism are exposed by Duval and Smith (2013). More recent studies have concerned issues of conservation and the developmental impacts of rural mountain tourism (Chambwe & Saayman, 2023) and most especially the opportunities for pro-poor impacts for local communities (Mutana & Mukwada, 2018, 2020a, 2020b). The operations and challenges of mountain tour guides are glimpsed through a recent investigation by Heath (2023).

The potential for initiating tourism routes in mountain communities and in particular of the Maluti route in the Drakensberg are reviewed by Mutana and Mukwaba (2020a). Critical sustainability issues are isolated with contrasting perspectives shown to exist among local communities, tourism business owners and local government officials (Mutana & Mukwada, 2018, 2020b). Further, the threats posed to the tourism assets in the northern Drakensberg by the proposed implementation of fracking recently have been demonstrated (Dube-Xaba & Mncube, 2023). In addition, the multiple controversies surrounding the proposed 'Drakensberg Cableway' located on the borders of the world heritage site, recently have been discussed (Heath, 2021).

3. Methods and Sources

The practice of archival research has been established as a key research method in the discipline of geography with scholarly works excavating the historical influences on contemporary places (Wideman, 2023). Arguably, leisure and recreation studies, as much as tourism geography research, can be strengthened by a greater historical awareness (Saarinen et al., 2017; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019). Tully and Carr (2021) issued a call for leisure scholars to engage more fully with archives as a data source for research purposes. They observe that "archives are an under-utilised strategy in leisure scholarship" (Tully & Carr, 2021, p. 889). The merits of undertaking historical research in order to enhance the progress of tourism and hospitality studies are highlighted by MacKenzie et al. (2020).

This study builds upon the foundations provided by the limited existing body of investigations around the history of mountain tourism activities in South Africa. In addition, the research draws upon the mining of archival sources. The archival material used for this investigation are mainly those of the Mountain Club of South Africa and the collection of guidebooks and reports produced by South African Railways which are housed at the Cape Town depot of the National Library. During the first half of the 20th century the publicity division of South African Railways was a powerful force for promoting both domestic travel and overseas tourism to

South Africa by familiarizing potential visitors about the country's varied landscapes and tourism products, including of its mountains (Foster, 2008; van Eeden 2014; Dlamini, 2020).

4. Results – The Evolution of Mountain Tourism in South Africa

4.1. Cape Town and Table Mountain

The beginnings of mountain tourism in South Africa are rooted in colonial history and of the growth of the recreation of mountaineering at the early settlement of Cape Town. According to Goetze (2002) Table Mountain has been styled variously as the 'symbolic sentinel of South Africa', 'Cape Town's magnificent playground' and 'South Africa's natural national monument'. Geldenhuys et al. (2016) review the progression of Table Mountain as a mountain tourism destination. These authors argue that it first emerged as a tourist destination in the early 1900s. The detailed research on mountaineering during the colonial era by Khan (2018a, 2018b) suggests, however, that Table Mountain was attracting a flow of visitors to climb the summit as early as the mid-19th century. As documented by Rosenthal (1956) these visitors included members of the British Royalty on tours of the Cape of Good Hope.

Racism is imprinted upon the colonial and apartheid history of Table Mountain (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Khan, 2018a). The period of the 19th century witnessed the growing use of Table Mountain for recreational purposes by Cape Town's white elite (Van Sittert, 2003). The relationship of the white elite with the mountain was described as mainly taking the form of recreation pursuits such as "carriage drives on the lower slopes, mountain walks and picnics on the summit" (Khan, 2022, p. 27). In addition, the mountain was "viewed as a site of both scientific and romantic pilgrimage" (Khan, 2018a, p. 55). This said, the recreation of mountaineering was constructed around racial hierarchies in the colonial era. Table Mountain was a sacred space for slaves and in Cape Muslim culture from the late 17th century (Goetze, 2002). For people of colour as the underclasses of Cape Town Table Mountain primarily was a place of work rather than of recreation. As shown by Khan (2018a, 2022) people of colour were relegated to subservient roles of porters, fetching wood, cooks and servants (Khan, 2018a, 2022). Only in the early 20th century can one record the climbing of Table Mountain by small numbers of Black recreation-seekers in Cape Town (Khan, 2018b).

During the early years of the 20th century around Cape Town there occurred the spatial spread of mountain tourism in part as a result of the organised climbing activities of the Mountain Club of South Africa (formed in 1891). Beyond the regular trips for climbing Table Mountain this organisation, which was dominated by the elite of colonial society, the club started organising weekend trips as well as an annual longer trip for mountaineers and rock climbers to enjoy other peaks in the western part of Cape Province (Mountain Club of South Africa, 1919). The geographical spread of mountain tourism outside Cape Town to the mountain ranges around (for example) Stellenbosch and Worcester was facilitated by the expanding South African railway network which allowed improved access to these areas for flows of mountaineer visitors coming from Cape Town. Nonetheless, Table Mountain remained the prime attraction of early mountain tourism in the Cape Province. The enhanced attraction of Table Mountain for non-climbers occurred with the opening on 4 October 1929 of the aerial cable way, the history of which goes back as far as the 1870s when proposals were aired originally to build a railway along the mountain slopes (Rosenthal, 1956). These plans for a funicular railway were halted by World War 1. Following the end of hostilities attention shifted to new proposals for the construction of a cableway which were made a Norwegian engineer.

4.2. The Drakensberg Mountains

The most significant axis for the development of mountain tourism in the Union of South Africa occurred, however, not in the Cape Province but in the Drakensberg mountains of Natal, the highest mountains of South Africa. Archaeological researchers revealed that what is known today as the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg mountains in the west of KwaZulu-Natal and bordering Lesotho had been settled by people for over 25ka (thousand) years. Mazel (2022, p. 190) shows, however, that the primary occupation has been within the last 3ka. Settlement was primarily by groups of hunter-gatherers with some evidence of an ephemeral pastoralist presence around 2ka and an increase of agricultural presence in the last 1 ka. The earlier work of Mazel (1992) reveals substantial changes occurred in Natal during the 19th century most importantly white settlement of the foothills of the Drakensberg and what was described as the 'eradication' of the Bushmen (Pickles, 1981, p. 31). The proclamation of certain areas as nature reserves was one of the foundations for what would become South Africa's first National park (Carruthers, 2013). Improved access to the Drakensberg was secured by the extension of the railway network and construction of a rough road to Mont-Aux-Sources, the core space for the activities of mountaineering tourists (Pickles, 1981). Colonial guidebooks of Natal included sections on the Drakensberg as the authorities

sought “to encourage tourism in the province” (Mazel, 1992, p. 761). The rise in popularity of mountaineering tourism in the Drakensberg was nurtured by the development and greater availability of photography which stimulated also a rise of general interest in mountain landscapes as tourism destinations (Pickles, 1981). As observed by Pickles (1981, p. 34) the “availability of photographs and the easier means of transport was important in the promotion of the Drakensberg and was most clearly recognised by the railway authorities themselves, who were concerned with increasing their passenger traffic”.

In terms of the establishment of the Drakensberg as a leisure destination Van Eeden (2014, p. 88) accords major credit to the work of South African railways for the organisation’s “early and astute identification” of its tourism potential as well as that of many seaside resorts which it also promoted as key leisure areas. Pickles (1981, p. 35) points out that as the Alpine and Rocky Mountain environments were better known and considered as more attractive to many tourists “it was necessary that the value of the Drakensberg be portrayed as essentially different from these other areas, not only as an area of beautiful scenery but also as an area of untouched wilderness and unclimbed peaks”. Energetic promotion of the Drakensberg occurred in one of the first publications produced after the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The publicity department of South African Railways issued in August 1910 the pamphlet titled ‘The Challenge of the Drakensberg — The Roof of Africa’ (South African Railways, 1910). The assets of this area as a mountain tourism destination were set forth in detail:

Europe has its Switzerland, famed throughout the civilized world for the splendour of its mountain scenery. For variety and charm, as well as accessibility, it has well-grounded claims to the title of a prince of playgrounds. But though its scenery is unchangingly beautiful and the familiar Alpine monarchs retain a ceaseless fascination for the mountaineer, yet at this date the charm of novelty and newness for many Alpine tourists has worn off...It is here that the Drakensberg range — particularly that portion known as the Mont aux Sources group — makes its challenge to all lovers of nature in her grandest and most sublime moods. Tourists and mountaineers can no longer be satisfied with repeating the ascents of the well-trodden peaks of the Continent or Canada, now that the beauties of the Drakensberg are making so emphatic a claim to attention. Here the geologist, the botanist and the naturalist can find in every direction opportunities for original research work of the most valuable character; and the mountaineer and sportsman can revel in regions untrodden from the beginning of time. The health and pleasure seeker can here hardly fail to obtain new energy and new inspiration, while the artist may find in the Drakensberg a new world to conquer and make his own (South African Railways, 1910, pp. 6–7).

Overall, it is apparent that the new landscapes that were opened up for tourism in the 1920s “were constructed for the leisured gaze of white subjectivities” (van Eeden, 2011, p. 603). Arguably, the illustrated articles published in the *South African Railway Magazine* played a vital role in familiarizing South Africans with the scenery of the country and acting as a trigger for domestic travel, including to the resorts in the Drakensberg (Foster, 2008; van Eeden, 2014). Emphasis was given to the improved access opportunities for local visitors: “The almost untouched range of the Drakensberg is within easy reach of all parts of South Africa. A few years ago it was almost a *terra incognita* but the progressive changes which have gradually taken place are so complete that there are few mountainous districts which are not approachable on fairly good roads” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1923, p. 255).

The railway authorities major promotional activities during the 1920s and 1930s, however, continued to target South Africa as a destination for international travel. A 1926 guidebook on ‘South Africa — The Sun Country’ listed the Drakensberg as one of the country’s main attractions (South African Railways and Harbours, 1926). It stated that the Drakensberg or Dragon’s Mountains “while not exactly Alpine in their effects, have a grandeur in their way quite as impressive” and continued to say that these mountains “are to South Africa what the Rockies are to North America” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1926, p. 14). Particular attention was given to highlighting the striking natural beauty of Mont-aux-Source region which it was observed “will hold its own as a climbing venue with any in the world” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1929, p. 9). The potential international visitor was assured, however, that the ascent of Mont-aux-Sources was not difficult and could be accomplished using Basotho ponies. It was described that “They are a distinct breed — these ponies — potbellied and hollow of flank. They present an uncouth appearance, but they can climb like mountain goats. The entire arrangements for the ascent are undertaken by the manager of the hostel and the excursion takes three days” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1934, p. 79).

By the close of the 1920s Harrismith in the Orange Free State was consolidating as an important western gateway for travellers heading to the resorts of the Drakensberg. The town of Harrismith sought to market itself as a mountain tourism destination with a healthy climate. It was stated as follows that “Harrismith has enjoyed a reputation from its earliest days as a health resort, and its bracing mountain climate is recognised even in Europe as particularly suited to those who may suffer from affections of the respiratory organs” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1927, p. 11). In particular, the town of Harrismith was recommended as a springboard for drive tourists going to the Drakensberg with Rydal Mount close to Witziesshoek a distance of 32 miles. At Rydal Mount visitors had the option to

hire guides and ponies in order to scale the mountain heights. From the 1930s there was enhanced infrastructural access to the Drakensberg resorts for drive tourists as a result of the improvement in national roads (Floor, 1985). The growth of mountain tourism was observed in several sources. In the early 1920s it could be noted that “every year sees an increasing number of South Africans visiting not only the mountains of their native country but also the many resorts strewn around them” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1923, p. 155). A decade later similar language appeared: “every year increasing numbers of tourists visit the mountains and the many resorts around them” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937, p. 60).

By 1936 the Drakensberg National Park was promoted to overseas travellers as one of the ‘wondersights of Southern Africa’ (South African Railways and Harbours, 1936). It was described as “an ideal holiday retreat for the mountaineer, the artist, the hiker or the trail riser, with adequate and comfortable accommodation available” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1936, p. 16). Other attractions for mountain tourists encompassed visits to Bushman cave paintings as well as ecotourism offerings as the “park has been set aside as a nature reserve, and herds of antelopes and other wild creatures roam the valleys, where trees and flowering plants in profusion are interspersed among the ferns” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1936). As a destination for mountain tourism the Drakensberg was viewed as comprising “some of the grandest mountain scenery imaginable and includes many caves containing interesting Bushman paintings” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937, p. 60).

Overall, by the late 1930s it was acknowledged that the publicity work undertaken by the South African Railways was instrumental to driving the rise of mountain tourism. One observer pinpointed the organisation’s role in “encouraging photographers and tourist to visit the Drakensberg, South Africans and visitors from overseas thus having come to realise that the country possesses in the mountain region demarcating boundary lines of Natal, the Orange Free State, the Cape Province and Basutoland, a spectacle of tremendous attraction” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937, p. 60). The Drakensberg was offered as an accessible and comfortable space for those in search of a wilderness experience. The accommodation offerings at the several resorts established across the Drakensberg were much upgraded from the early thatched huts that were the first hostels and what were even described as the first ‘hotels’ in the area (Carruthers, 2013). By 1937 the accommodation services at resorts were described as follows:

The Drakensberg resorts have a distinctive charm and combine the essential features of more sophisticated establishments with the rustic simplicity and traditional hospitality of South African farms. All creature comforts are provided for, the visitor may wander among the hills to his heart’s content, returning every

evening, if he wishes, to the amenities of civilization or, if he prefers, with a few chosen friends he may bivouac in some secluded valley with the streams and stars for company (South African Railways and Harbours, 1937, p. 3 and p. 5).

By the close of the 1930s the Drakensberg mountain area was now visited not only by mountaineers but by different varieties of pleasure seekers. This is evidenced by reports such that: “for the artist and photographer the possibilities are almost bewildering in this spectacular realm, and always for the lover of outdoor life there is the good smell of mother earth, the arched vault of heaven, the wayward winds, the gathering clouds, the conquering sunshine, and abounding variety and majesty in Nature” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937, p. 63). In the immediate apartheid (post-1948) years and into the 1950s the tourism economy of the Drakensberg was further boosted by the introduction by South African Railways of new luxury buses to provide tours to places of scenic and historical interest. The Drakensberg National Park was offered as a stop-over on the regular circular tour that was introduced between Johannesburg and Durban.

5. Conclusion

Arguably, mountain tourism enjoys a long history in many parts of the world albeit much of that history remains unresearched. This paper pinpoints one facet of its neglected history through the lens of mountain tourism in South Africa and thereby contributes a historical dimension to the growing international literature around the concept of niche tourism. The analysis further expands scholarship in South Africa on tourism’s past, tourism history and the historical geographies of tourism, disclosing the early and unfolding of the specific niche of mountain tourism as a component of national tourism development. It reveals that the origins of mountain tourism in South Africa must be situated geographically at Table Mountain in the urban setting of Cape Town. At the beginning of the 20th century the axis of mountain tourism shifted eastwards to the unfolding developments and challenges of tourism in the rural Drakensberg mountain range. Throughout the colonial years and continuing into the apartheid era van Eeden (2022) points out that Table Mountain and the Drakensberg mountains were represented as the exclusive preserve of white South Africans and served to establish their entitlement and identity.

It is evident that the first chapter of mountain tourism in South Africa opened with the growth of elite mountaineering and the start of mountaineering tourism. By the 1930s, however, mountain tourism in South Africa was attracting a broader

societal cohort of participants who were experiencing a range of leisure and recreational interests beyond that of mountaineering. It has been demonstrated that whilst mountain tourism has been dominated by (predominantly white) domestic visitors the promotional endeavours of the South African Railways played a vital role in putting South Africa — and especially the Drakensberg — on the international map as a destination for mountain tourists. Overall, the study points to the value of historical methods and of the exploration of archival sources in tourism and recreation studies.

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CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Christian M. Rogerson: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, software, supervision, validation, visualization, writing — original draft, writing — review & editing. **Jayne M. Rogerson:** conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, software, supervision, validation, visualization, writing — original draft, writing — review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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Przeszłość turystyki niszowej: pierwszy rozdział turystyki górskiej w Republice Południowej Afryki

Streszczenie. W wielu krajach turystyka górską ma długą historię, która w dużym stopniu pozostaje nieudokumentowana. Niniejszy artykuł omawia jeden z zapoznanych rozdziałów przeszłości rekreacji i turystyki na globalnym Południu, a mianowicie rozwój turystyki górskiej jako formy turystyki niszowej w RPA. Artykuł wpisuje się w ograniczone międzynarodowe badania historyczne dotyczące turystyki niszowej i stanowi wkład do dotychczasowej literatury na temat turystyki w RPA. Korzystając z ograniczonych dostępnych publikacji naukowych i źródeł archiwalnych, autorzy opisują początkowy etap rozwoju turystyki górskiej w RPA od połowy XIX wieku do początków lat pięćdziesiątych XX wieku. Ich zdaniem początki turystyki górskiej w RPA wiążą się z Górą Stołową w Kapsztadzie. W późniejszym okresie coraz większym zainteresowaniem zaczęło się cieszyć wysokie pasmo Gór Smocznych. Choć górskie obszary turystyczne w RPA odwiedzają głównie turyści krajowi, autorzy twierdzą, że dzięki kolejom południowoafrykańskim, RPA — a zwłaszcza Góry Smocze — stają się potencjalnym celem dla turystów zagranicznych zainteresowanych turystyką górską.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka górską, alpinizm, RPA, badania archiwalne, Góra Stołowa, Kapsztad, Góry Smocze



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