

Bid to tap city's 'sweet waters'

Old springs could supply new wealth

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THIRTEEN fresh-water springs which first attracted man to Cape Town are to be uncovered – thousands of years after they were first enjoyed at the foot of Table Mountain.

Without the springs, which bubble out from the rock, Cape Town is unlikely to have been established.

The springs have been extensively researched by environmental planner Caron von Zyl, working with the Cape Town Partnership, and are now set to be re-opened, and possibly tapped, after centuries of sustaining Cape Town.

The project has been dubbed "Reclaim Camissa" – the name originally given to the City Bowl by Khoi pastoral farmers, "The Place of Sweet Waters".

"This is about the origins of Cape Town as a human settlement. No water, no humans, no settlement," explained Andrew Boraine, head of the Cape Town Partnership.

"For thousands of years people have been bringing their livestock to Cape Town to sustain them during the summer months, because there wasn't any water anywhere else."

"These springs are the 'vul-

sans d'être' of Cape Town."

The 13 springs bubble forth from where the sandstone meets the granite, the biggest of which is Stads Fontein (City Fountain), near St Cyprian's school in Oranjezicht.

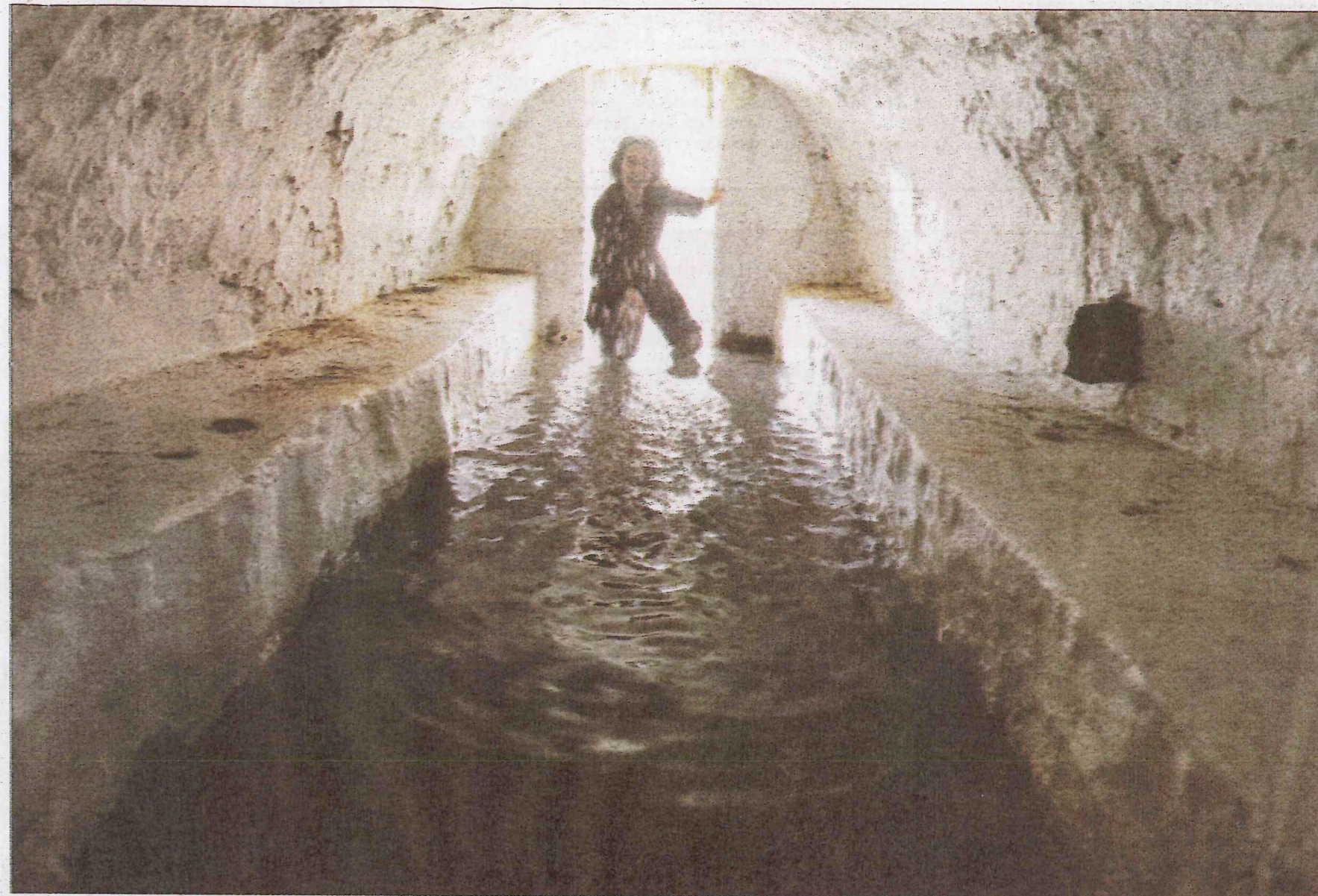
Boraine explained the use of the springs in early colonial times: the source of the springs was marshy swamps, so the Dutch canalised the water – to water the Dutch East India Company's gardens, and for the water's use itself.

The spring waters were central to the decision to establish a station at the Cape to supply the trade ships with fresh produce and water.

"They built a castle next to the Gardens, and diverted water around the Cape of Good Hope Castle for a moat. So you can see that the first conflict (between indigenous inhabitants and the settlers) was not around land, but actually around water," he explained. "This whole system of water fed the early settlement."

The Dutch had channelled the water down through the town in several canals, including the Buitengracht, the Kaizergracht and the Heerengracht – today all major streets.

"Later on (in the early 19th century) Victorian engineers



WELL WELL: Researcher Caron von Zyl investigates one of the natural fresh-water springs which bubble out of the foot of Table Mountain – which determined the origins of Cape Town.

PICTURES: AYANDA NDAMANE



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arrived, and put the canals underground in municipal stormwaters for reasons of public health."

Various water storage facilities were later established, such as the Molteno dam – and Cape Town slowly grew less reliant on the original springs.

Today the springs' water simply flows into the stormwater and into Table Bay.

Now that is about to change, Boraine reported.

"We are retracing this whole system. We will be investigating: 'Could we make better use of this fresh water?'"

Possible uses could be public drinking fountains in the Company Gardens, or providing water for the Green Point urban park.

"We just don't know yet, and that's what we're investigating.

Other cities have rediscovered their historic water supplies, by digging them up."

But beyond the water's possible use, the springs' project had also awakened huge cultural and educational interest.

Boraine said it was also appropriate that the springs were being investigated at the time that Cape Town was again facing an energy-supply crisis.

He recalled how the water had been used to power the Graaff generator, which had been the first hydro electric generator in the country. And also how the waters had turned the grain mill on what is today Mill Street.

"These springs really tell the origins of our country. But also about clean water and alternative energy," Boraine said.



WATER GATE: Researcher Caron von Zyl opens a door of the main fresh water spring at the foot of Table Mountain.