

HISTORICAL SPECIAL INTEREST TOURISM: THE EVOLUTION OF MOUNTAINEERING IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract : Scholarship on special interest tourism has burgeoned since the 1980s. Although this expanding research interest is relatively new, the phenomenon of special interest tourism is not of recent origin as many of its forms, such as mountaineering, exhibit a long historical record. Most research on special interest tourism concentrates on contemporary issues. The objective is to present a historical perspective on special interest tourism. Using archival sources an analysis is undertaken of the evolution of mountaineering in South Africa as a recreational sport and incipient form of special interest tourism. Cape Town's Table Mountain and the Drakensberg mountains provide the geographical focus of discussion. The results demonstrate that during the 1920s and 1930s tourism promoters in South Africa acknowledged the potential of special interest mountaineers to contribute to tourism growth. The documented experience of early mountaineering in South Africa provides an example of racism in recreation by showing that the country's recreational practices became constructed around politically-imposed racial hierarchies.

Key words: special interest tourism, mountaineering, South Africa, archival research, racial spatiality

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'special interest tourism' appeared during the 1980s (Weiler and Hall, 1992) and became a complex phenomenon in the 21st century (Trauer, 2006). It was applied to describe the marked shift away from the demand for

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mainstream tourism offerings that were “standardized and rigidly packaged in nature, to forms of tourism that were more specialized and unique” (Agarwal et al., 2018, p. 1). In the words of Trauer (2006, p. 183) tourism consumption patterns and special interest tourism are a reflection of “the continuously increasing diversity of leisure interests of the late-modern leisure society”. For Weiler and Hall (1992) special interest tourism could be regarded as a form of serious leisure given that it exhibits several of its characteristics, namely requiring participants to have specialized knowledge and being in search of durable benefits such as self-enrichment and recreation. Sometimes referred to as niche tourism, the concept of special interest tourism was consolidated to refer to specialized tourism products which are offered mainly to small groups of tourists (Trauer, 2006).

Nearly 20 years ago it could be observed by McKercher and Chan (2005, p. 21) that the special interest tourism market was “very special” as it was recognized that these tourists spent more, stayed longer and travelled more frequently than other kinds of travellers. Over the past decade Wen and Yu (2020) highlight that special interest tourism has become established as a valuable niche market for multi-product destinations as well as a core activity for single product destinations. According to Soleimani et al. (2019) this genre of tourism caters to the needs of specific markets focusing on diverse experiences and activities that fall outside the mainstream of mass tourism. In recent years, special interest tourism as an alternative to mass tourism has become popular as a tourism development strategy that potentially might act as a counter to the problems of over-tourism at certain destinations. Further, it is acknowledged as promoting place authenticity and at the same time projecting a diverse destination image. Researchers suggest that several different forms of special interest tourism are anticipated to expand in significance in the post-COVID-19 environment (Nair and Mohanty, 2021; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021a, 2021b).

Arguably, the growth of special interest tourism is in broad terms the consequence of a shift to a discerning and heterogenous travel market with demand increasingly focused on interest-based tourism experiences (Agarwal et al., 2018). Over the past few years there has occurred a mushrooming growth of academic writings concerning special interest tourism and around its products (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021c; Novelli et al., 2022; Sousa et al., 2022). Although this scholarship is relatively recent the phenomenon of special interest tourism is far from new because there is evidence of several of its activities recording a long history; one example is that of recreational fishing. Nevertheless, the extant scholarship on special interest tourism concentrates on contemporary matters with minimal focus regarding historical concerns. The emphasis in literature on present-day issues is not surprising in light of the growing volume of research on special interest tourism which is fuelled by considerations surrounding its potential positive benefits for destination development (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021a; Novelli, 2022; Novelli et al., 2022; Sousa et al., 2022).

Against this backcloth the aim in this paper is to address the under-researched past of special interest tourism. The specific case is the historical evolution of mountaineering as a recreational sport and incipient form of special interest tourism. Apollo and Wengel (2022a, p. 253) assert that mountaineering tourism “constitutes a subset of mountain tourism, and it is a part of an increasingly growing segment of adventure tourism”. Richens et al. (2016, p. 3)

highlight that the experiences and record of mountain tourism are significant “in the notion of special interest or special niche tourism, which engages in mindful and authentic experiences that have been characterized based on levels of customer participation (passive to active) and the relationship (absorption to immersion) to the environment in which the experience is occurring”. The geographical context is South Africa where mountaineering represents one dimension of the little studied growth of recreation and tourism in rural areas (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021d). The next sections turn to present a literature review on the development of mountaineering tourism followed by a brief discussion of methods and sources. The major part of the paper concentrates on the early evolution of mountaineering in South Africa which is examined as a historical study in special interest tourism. Included also is a discussion of its distinctive political dimensions in the environment of colonial South Africa including the early apartheid (post-1948) period.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Apollo and Andreychouk (2022) point out that the definition of mountainous areas is arbitrary and there is no qualitative or quantitative differentiation between hills and mountains. According to Apollo and Wengel (2022a, p. 1) a mountain is simply defined as a landform that rises prominently above its surroundings, generally has steep slopes, a relatively confined summit area, and considerable local relief. Dax and Tamme (2023) stress that mountains are perceived as places of biodiversity, as attractive locations with breathtaking views, and characterized by their unique landscape features.

Since ancient times mountains have been a source of fascination for humankind. Indeed, the attractions of mountains with their spectacular scenery, majestic beauty and high amenity resources for recreation and tourism have long been acknowledged (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005). Among others Higham et al. (2015) point out that several cultures developed symbolic, emotional and ancestral attachments to mountains the landscapes of which therefore hold a special significance. Mountains are a source of mysticism and inspiration in many cultures and travel to mountains has been catalysed variously for purposes of hunting and resource gathering, to reconnect with nature, adventure, recreation and sport (Apollo and Andreychouk 2022). Beedie (2015) asserts that historically mountains are wild and dangerous places surrounded in mythology that generates an attractiveness because of their essential ‘otherness’ as the antithesis of so-term ‘civilized life’. Boyes and Mackenzie (2015) contend that mountains and wilderness areas are culturally interwoven. Mountains are a component of wilderness experiences sought after in contemporary urban Western culture (Beedie, 2015).

As pointed out by Apollo and Andreychouk (2022, p. 2) historically the term mountaineering referred to “the set of actions that led to the ascent of a mountain peak”. According to Beedie (2007, p. 25) the activity of “mountaineering is usually understood as a battle between human endeavour and wild nature”. The evolution of mountaineering has attracted useful contributions from several scholars, most notably by Beedie (2015) and by Musa and Sarker (2015). Holt (2008) presents a rich nuanced study on the early development of German and Austrian mountaineering. Apollo and Andreychouk (2022) provide a useful periodization of the evolution of mountaineering. Six

stages (or phases) are identified across the history of mountaineering from the evolution of human presence on mountains (Table 1).

Table 1. Periodisation of the Evolution of Mountaineering
(Data Source: After Apollo and Andreychouk 2022, p. 2).

Time Period	Phase/Stage
Before 1786	Pre-mountaineering
1786-1864	Early mountaineering
1864-1899	Classic Mountaineering
1900-1964	Modern Mountaineering
1964-2021	Contemporary Mountaineering
2021-present	Commercial mass mountaineering

The pre-mountaineering phase is marked by early interactions between humans and mountains lasting from ancient times until the successful ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786. It was a period during which there was expanded recognition and later improved access to high mountain regions. The second phase of early mountaineering is viewed as the beginning of mountaineering in its modern sense. For Beedie (2013, p.19) the 19th century conquest and subjugation of mountains “coincided with the modernist ambition of control and organization”. According to Beedie (2007, p. 25) when the sport of mountaineering emerged in the 19th century “it appeared to offer an empathetic allegiance to a philosophy drawing heavily upon the tenets of Romanticism”. Arguably, notions of “physical challenge, wilderness, solitude, contemplation, self-development, spirituality, mystery, authenticity and awe in the face of sublime nature” were all influential factors in establishing a mountaineering tradition (Beedie, 2007, p. 25).

The years 1854-1865 are styled ‘the golden age’ of mountaineering as it was during this period that most peaks in the European Alps were climbed. Musa and Sarker (2015) point out that mountain climbing was viewed as a fresh approach to enjoy the spirit of mountains. Alpinists started to ascend mountain peaks and deliberately accepted the challenge of climbing and its accompanying dangers (Holt, 2008). This second period also witnessed the birth of the first mountain organizations or clubs. Phase 3 of classic mountaineering is dated as from 1864 to the close of the 19th century. It was denoted by the rapid development of high mountain climbing, albeit geographically concentrated in Europe. During this classic period, it is witnessed the emergence of mountaineering in its present form with ranks of professional guides and improved equipment (Apollo and Andreychouk 2022). For Musa and Sarker (2015) this is considered the period when mountaineering emerged as an adventurous activity alongside a few significant incidents. Furthermore, mountain climbing at this time both for social and economic reasons became a fashionable elite activity.

The fourth period of modern mountaineering spans the beginning of the 20th century and runs through until 1964. This period represented the era of the conquest beyond Europe of several of the world’s highest peaks at 8000 metres. Musa and Sarker (2015) document what they style the growing international flavour of mountaineering with the climbing of peaks in various parts of North America, South America, Asia and Africa which culminated in the ‘high point’ of mountaineering history, the summitting of Mount Everest in 1953. During the

20th century mountaineering began to pivot away from being an exclusive activity of elites “to becoming a diversified and commodified adventure tourism product” (Apollo and Wengel, 2022b, p. 253). The fifth phase is characterised by the final conquest of others of the world’s highest and most rugged peaks. There followed the sixth phase in recent years of the establishment of commercial expeditions to high mountains leading to the most recent period of commercial mass mountaineering with the guiding of (often) inexperienced climbers to high mountain regions such as the Himalayas.

As mentioned, at the outset, in its formative periods mountaineering was an elite form of recreation or sport (Apollo and Wengel, 2022a, 2022b). In recent years, however, many mountain destinations have evolved a number of different products targeted at various categories of mountain tourists. Historically, it is argued that those who participated in the adventurous activity of climbing came from the “leisured elite” classes of Western Europe, Britain or the USA (Beedie, 2021, p. 96). As Hall (2018) stresses essentially mountaineering was a masculinized environment with only small numbers of women encountered in its early years. Beedie (2021, p. 96) elaborates that the initial cohort of mountaineers was mostly “men, these pioneers forged routes up intimidating rock faces in their countries and abroad, initially in the pursuit of science but increasingly for personal satisfaction and the accumulation of symbolic capital that their climbs generated”. Overall, therefore, at least until the beginning of the twentieth century, the hiking, trekking and climbing of mountains were treated as elite male-dominated activities (Apollo and Andreychouk, 2022). As is noted by Higham et al. (2015) there occurred the socio-historical construction of mountaineering as a sport. Over the period of its historical development the sport of mountaineering has been accompanied by an improved infrastructure for access as well as advances in terms of equipment including of personal clothing (Apollo and Andreychouk 2022). Several studies concentrate on the commodification of mountaineering in terms of the professionalism of mountain guiding (Beedie, 2003; Beedie and Hudson, 2003; Thompson-Carr, 2015).

METHODS

In terms of research methods, the foundation was a scoping and examination of existing literature on the history of mountaineering in South Africa (Rosenthal, 1956; Pickles, 1981; Carruthers, 2013; Khan, 2018a, 2018b, 2019). In order to provide added insight into the early development and evolution of mountaineering in South Africa an historical approach was utilized with the examination of archival sources. The practice of archival research has been established as a key research method in geography with scholarly works excavating the historical influences on contemporary places (Craggs, 2016; Wideman, 2023). 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 and Carr, 2021, p. 889). Likewise, Abadi Asab et al. (2022) point to the merits for hospitality and leisure scholars of tapping into archival sources. The research for this study uses documentary material sourced from the historical papers lodged at the Cape Town depot of the South African National Library. The time period covered for this investigation begins in the early 1900s and closes in the early apartheid years. Material relating to the activities of the Mountain Club of South Africa was examined. In addition, access was secured to

the collections of information resources and guide books which were produced by the South African Railways and Harbours. The historian Jeremy Foster (2003, 2008) demonstrates the transformative role of this organization as a powerful agency of change in the new country that was established in 1910 as the Union of South Africa. It was described as ‘a government within a government’ and “practically inseparable from government” (van Eeden, 2014, p. 84). Baffi (2014, p. 4) observed that this agency soon “became omnipotent” and enacted policies impacting every aspect of the country’s economic and social life. According to Pirie (2011, p. 74) the operator of South Africa’s railway and harbours was “the arch promoter of overseas tourism to South Africa for thirty years after Union in 1910”. Arguably, the publicity division of South African Railways became highly influential for stimulating both domestic travel and overseas tourism to South Africa by familiarizing potential visitors about the country’s different landscapes and tourism assets (van Eeden, 2011).

RESULTS

The evolution of mountaineering in South Africa is essentially the unfolding history of two different mountainous areas in the country. The earliest focus in the colonial period is upon the western part of the Cape Colony and of mountaineering associated with Table Mountain in Cape Town. By the beginning of the 20th century the central geographical focus of mountaineering pivots to the eastern part of the country and the Drakensberg mountains.

The recreational use of Cape Town’s iconic Table Mountain in South Africa dates back to the period of European exploration from the 15th century which would be viewed as the ‘pre-mountaineering’ era in South Africa. Ships headed to the East Indies stopped over at the Cape to take on water and barter for cattle with the area’s indigenous inhabitants. Groups of sailors and traders climbed Table Mountain for purposes of recreation and exercise after often months of confinement in cramped quarters (Khan, 2018a). With growing European settlement at the Cape the climbing of Table Mountain became a recreational activity of the Cape’s social, professional and governing colonial elite. In common with the history of mountaineering in Europe therefore the sport of mountaineering began in South Africa as an elite activity and geographically started to be practiced in Cape Town during the late 19th century (Khan, 2018b). Khan (2022, p. 27) points out that mountaineering as a sport is a relatively recent phenomenon in South Africa and is linked to “when European alpinists visiting the Cape introduced local mountaineers to the emerging sport of rock climbing”. This said, it must be acknowledged that the activity of mountaineering as *survival* rather than recreation dates back to the pre-colonial era when the indigenous populations used Table Mountain variously for hunting, the gathering of wild fruits, roots and nuts, for their encampments and for grazing of their cattle (Khan, 2018a, 2022).

In a rich series of investigations Khan (2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2022) documents that the origins and development of mountaineering in South Africa are inextricably interwoven with the politics of race and class. The use of Table Mountain for recreational purposes became entrenched by the local elite and visitors such that by the mid-19th century the ascent of the mountain was a well-established activity. As Khan (2018b, p. 56) stresses the recreational use of the mountain was firmly entrenched by the race and class divisions in the colonial era. For most of the colonial era from 1652-1910 it was witnessed that

the politics of race and class governed the growing use of Table Mountain (Khan, 2018a, 2022). As a result, the recreational use of Table Mountain was largely restricted to the white elite with the black underclass of slaves, servants and the labouring poor relegated to subservient roles. It is evidenced that due to inequalities in colonial society the recreational and sporting use of Table Mountain by the black under-class was constrained. The documented experience of early mountaineering in South Africa provides an instructive case of racism in recreation. Indeed, it shows how recreational practices in mountaineering can become constructed around racial hierarchies. The concept of 'racial spatiality', as described by Alderman and Inwood (2023, p. 331), "captures how the everyday processes of racism work to secure and legitimize sports-related spaces as White and thus restrict and discourage participation and representation from people of colour". The marginalization of people of colour from participating in mountaineering was reinforced by legislation introduced in the early apartheid period from 1948. The Separate Amenities Act restricted access to accommodation on hiking trails and in nature reserves to whites and the Group Areas Act resulted in the removal of District Six, an area mainly occupied by Coloured (mixed race) people and living close to Table Mountain and dispersing the community to distant townships (Khan, 2019, 2022).

The actual consolidation of mountaineering as a (white) sport was given considerable impetus by the founding in Cape Town in 1891 of the 'Mountain Club' (subsequently renamed the Mountain Club of South Africa) of South Africa with one of its stated objectives being the organisation of mountain expeditions in South Africa (Rosenthal, 1956; Pickles, 1981). Initially this took the form of one-day trips up Table Mountain or week-end duration travels to other peaks in the Western Cape (Mountain Club of South Africa, 1919). The expansion of the railways network facilitated the spread of mountaineers beyond Cape Town to climb other local peaks, the highest of which in the Western Province was Matroosberg (7381 feet) in the area of Worcester. In addition to one-day or weekend trips, the Club organized an annual excursion which involved hiring a special train with a dining saloon to a selected peak which might provide "enjoyment both for those who prefer country rambling and for those who desire actual mountain climbing" (Mountain Club of South Africa, 1919, p. 2). The popularization of mountaineering in South Africa was expanded further by the club's publication of an 'Annual' the first of which appeared in 1894. This served to highlight original accounts of new routes up Table Mountain as well as explorations pursued to other mountain ranges. Originally, the Club was only Cape Town-based but from 1893 other sections were established variously at Worcester, Wellington, Stellenbosch and Paarl in the Cape Province and beyond as it was noted "a strong section has been formed in Natal" (Mountain Club of South Africa, 1919, p. 9). According to Khan (2022, p. 28) the Mountain Club of South Africa was firmly part of the colonial establishment and attracted only "the cream of the social, professional and governing elite". Although the Drakensberg mountains in Natal subsequently garnered the greatest attention from mountaineers it must be understood that "the birthplace, the cradle, and the real home of South African cragsmanship is the Western Province of the Cape, by which must be understood the lower westerly and south-westerly districts of the old Cape Colony" (South African Railways and Harbours, 1923, p. 251).

From the beginnings of the 20th century the geographical axis of mountaineering as recreation and sport shifts from the western parts of South

Africa around Cape Town to the Drakensberg mountains. As Pickles (1981) shows that the earliest traveller images of the Drakensberg, as recorded in the first half of the 19th century, were of a wild and sublime landscape. The implementation of formal colonial administration in Natal by Britain was accompanied by increased number of travelling observers as well as settlers. Only in 1908 did there occur the first systematic exploration by white settlers of the Natal Drakensberg (Mazel, 1992). Arguably, the landscape attitudes towards the Drakensberg mountains shifted away from fear and replaced instead by the acceptance of potential dangers of operating in such an environment which “was a necessary pre-condition for the large-scale development of mountaineering which was to follow” (Pickles, 1981, p. 32). The changing attitudes to this mountain region were facilitated also by the growth of photography and the dissemination of photographic images of the region (van Eeden, 2014). Mountaineering visitors gradually grew in numbers. Nevertheless, by the early years of the 1900s only a few of the Drakensberg peaks had been ascended by recreational climbers. In 1912 it was forwarded that the sport of mountaineering was relatively new in South Africa and the Drakenberg was unlike the European Alps where the major peaks had been conquered on several occasions (Carruthers, 2013).

A turning point for the growth of mountaineering in the Drakensberg is linked to the establishment of the Natal National Park. This process started in 1903 and with a bid to build tourism when a local entrepreneur purchased the farm Goodoo “with the idea of attracting holidaymakers to the mountains” (Carruthers, 2013, p. 463). In 1906 a formal proclamation was made of a National Park in the northern Mont-aux-Sources area of Drakensberg. Pickles (1981, p. 33) maintains that the creation of the National Park as a conservation area was “undoubtedly influenced by the National Parks movement in Canada, the USA and Britain, and by the conservation movement, particularly in the USA in the decade from 1900 to 1910”. For the growth of mountaineering experiences, however, the challenges of access and of accommodation needed to be addressed. The area of the northern Drakensberg was accessed potentially from the sides of both Natal and Orange Free State where two tourist hostels were established by local private entrepreneurs, one in each province. The access to the Goodoo hostel was via railway to Ladysmith and from there a sixhour journey to the hostel by wagon. From the Free State side, the closest access point was Aberfeldy which was reached by a railway branch line from Kroonstad. According to Carruthers (2013) at Aberfeldy passengers disembarked for a transfer to the Rydal Mount Hostel at Witzieshoek, a location much closer to the summit plateau than Goodoo.

Accessibility remained a major challenge, however, until the completion of a railway branch line to Bergville in 1914 (Foster, 2003). The majority of early visitors were local groups of mountaineers from Cape Town, the core centre of the activities of the Mountain Club of South Africa. It was observed that for “climbers from the Cape, the grandeur of the Drakensberg was appealing and climbing conditions were very different” to the western Cape which as a winter rainfall area means that climbing was mainly a recreational activity for summer (Carruthers, 2013, p. 468). By contrast, in the Drakensberg climbing mostly occurred in winter, a period of clear crisp weather and sometimes a blanket of snow. Overall, from the accounts of climbers as published in *The Mountain Club Annual* most visitors to the Drakensberg were English-speaking urbanites from

Cape Town but with groups also from Johannesburg, Durban and Pietermaritzburg. These mountaineers were typically from the elite groups “with sufficient resources by way of money and leisure time to indulge their recreational pursuits” (Carruthers, 2013, p. 467).

In terms of the establishment of the Drakensberg as a mountaineering tourism destination major credit is given to the publicity material produced for and marketed by South African Railways (van Eeden, 2014). Foster (2003, p. 673) avers that the Drakensberg evoked strong associations with the Alps and that the early valorization of the Drakensberg was “also linked to the appeal of cool, elevated locations in a hot climate”. In 1910, the year of the establishment of the Union of South Africa, the publicity department of South African Railways (later to become South African Railways and Harbours) issued a promotional pamphlet on the Drakensberg and focused particularly upon the Mont-aux-Source area. The target market for the promotional message was clearly the international rather than the domestic mountaineer. The appeal of the Drakensberg was stressed as a new destination for mountaineers to satisfy their craving for a ‘first ascent’ (South African Railways, 1910). It was argued that climbers in the Alps and in the Rocky Mountains could “no longer be satisfied with repeating the ascents of the well-trodden peaks” (South African Railways, 1910, p. 7). In particular, at a time when it was observed “the beauties of the Drakensberg are making so emphatic a claim to attention” that “the mountaineer and the sportsman can revel in regions untrodden from the beginning of time” (South African Railways, 1910, p. 7). The publication offered several ‘tips’ for the travelling mountaineer, including the need for a “steady and even pace” and in terms of climbing attire for ‘gentlemen’ the following detailed advice was offered: “It is desirable to reduce one’s luggage to a minimum. A fairly strong tweed suit (knickerbockers for preference), or riding breeches, as in the high altitudes the weather in the early morning and evening is very cold. It is desirable also to be provided with a heavy overcoat. Two pairs of comfortable strong boots and a fair supply of hosiery and underclothing” (South African Railways, 1910, p. 9). By 1914 local awareness of the mountaineering opportunities also was growing; it was stated that “among South African Mountains the Drakensberg have won widest fame in the homeland” (South African Railways, 1914, p. 9).

The active promotional campaigns for international mountaineers to visit the Drakensberg continued during the 1920s and 1930s represent a clear demonstration of the recognition by South African Railways of the potential tourism market offered by this form of special interest sport and recreation. For example, a 1926 guidebook on ‘South Africa – The Sun Country’ the Drakensberg was listed as one of the country’s main attractions and described as “this dreamland of climbers” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1926, p. 19). The attractions of the Drakensberg National Park area were elaborated upon as follows:

But beyond all else, it is the impressive glory of strength which is seen and felt in the Drakensberg that makes the powerful appeal. And upon the summits of its peaks, towering thousands of feet above the surrounding country, even the most prosaic of us is fain to linger, marking the splendours of the rising or the setting sun, seeking solace in this magic region, finding the balsam of health in every breath of the life-giving air. In brief, this land of frowning peaks offers air, cool and sweet to breathe, the sound of rushing waters to the ear: a glorious

panorama to refresh the eye – and solitude and rest (South African Railways and Harbours, 1926, p. 19).

In 1929 similar positive endorsements were given for international visitors to South Africa to consider travel to the Drakensberg as a contrast to seeing and experiencing wild life in Kruger National Park. The region was styled as having “the atmosphere of mystic charm that hangs over this scenic wonderland”. At the close of the 1920s the Drakensberg was promoted both as a mountaineering destination and for its natural beauty to attract other leisure visitors. It was asserted that “primarily, the park is a paradise for mountaineers and lovers of natural beauty. The former can expend their energy on (climbing) ‘The Sentinel,’” nearly eleven thousand feet high, and Cathkin Peak, nearly a thousand feet higher, while the latter can exercise their talent with camera or brush” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1929, p. 24).

By 1937 the Drakensberg National Park was marketed as ‘South Africa’s mountain playground’ (South African Railways and Harbours, 1937). Carlyle-Gall (1937, p. 58) could observe that the “mountain clubs of the Union have steadily made known to South Africans the delights of climbing, and European mountaineers generally are becoming more informed that in Southern Africa they may find all the pleasures of rock climbing and other delights without the intense cold which is such a feature of European peaks”. Nevertheless, as Khan (2019, 2022) shows the participation in the ‘delights of mountain climbing’ in South Africa were restricted by the racial inequalities of the colonial and segregation era. The critical role played by improved infrastructure – especially of roads - was central to the greater opportunities for both domestic and international mountaineers in the Drakensberg. It was made clear that the Drakensberg was now “readily reached” whereas a “comparatively few years ago it was an unknown land”. The expansion in mountain tourism was observable: “every year increasing numbers of tourists visit the mountains and the many resorts around them” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937, p. 60). At the end of the 1930s awareness of the pleasures of mountain climbing in the Drakensburg had expanded among South Africans as well as of mountaineers from outside South Africa (South African Railways and Harbours, 1937).

Although tourists were drawn by the area’s natural beauty, visits to cave paintings and nature tourism attractions, much attention continue to focus on the Drakensberg as a place for mountaineering recreation. Favourable comparisons were made to the other established and emergent foci for mountaineering. The Drakensberg peaks were described in their own peculiar environment “as interesting as the Alps or the Himalayas are in theirs” (South African Railways and Harbours, 1937, p. 3). Another constant narrative related to the area’s extraordinary natural beauty: “many experienced travellers and mountaineers have expressed in glowing terms their admiration of the remarkable grandeur and interest” (Carlyle-Gall, 1937, p. 60). By the close of the 1930s along with railway access the improvements which had been made to South Africa’s Road network as well as the spread of motor car ownership had overcome the infrastructural challenges that constrained the area’s early mountaineers.

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the limited existing scholarship on the historical development of different forms of recreation and sport in the Global South. The evolution of mountaineering in South Africa exhibits certain parallels to the

phases identified across the international record by Apollo and Andreychouk (2022). The pre-mountaineering period is that of South Africa in pre-colonial times when the indigenous populations used the mountains for survival rather than recreational purposes. The phase of early mountaineering in South Africa was geographically focused around Table Mountain and the Cape Colony, an activity dominated by the (white) colonial elite. The beginnings of the 20th century witness the emergence of 'modern mountaineering', its spread to the Drakensberg and of the attempts by the publicity agents of South African railways to put the country on the international map of mountaineering. By the 1940s the attractions of South Africa's Mountain regions were no longer the exclusive domain of mountaineers but increasingly of leisure seekers to enjoy the natural beauty, heritage and wildlife (fauna and flora) of these spaces. The study demonstrates that mountaineering as a special interest form of sport and recreation was recognized during the 1920s and 1930s for its potential to contribute to the expansion of tourism. In addition, the findings underscore the need to appreciate the (often hidden) politics of recreation as the record of colonial and apartheid South Africa demonstrates how recreational spaces can become structured by racial hierarchies.

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