

ROAD, AIR AND SEA TRANSPORT AT KLEINZEE, 1924 TO 2000

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Abstract

Because of its out-of-the-way location on the West Coast of South Africa, transport was a problem for Kleinzee (Namaqualand Mines) since the discovery of diamonds during the 1920s. The diamond industry grew and with it the need for efficient transport. Kleinzee was not, as was the case with Alexander Bay, to its north, a state-controlled mine, which inevitably complicated the expansion of transport systems. In this article the supply of road, air and sea transport between the years 1924 and 2000 is briefly highlighted.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to Kleinzee's isolation on the northwest coast of Namaqualand and the absence of a railroad north of Bitterfontein the mining community of Namaqualand Mines (NM) since the earliest years depended (and still depends) upon good road, air and marine transport.

Before 1926 it was mainly road and sea transport that was important for the Namaqualand region and its copper mines. When diamonds were discovered at Alexander Bay and Kleinzee in that year the whole complexion of Namqualand changed. The need for machinery and mining supplies (which included food, medicine, etc.) was much greater than that of the copper mines and it naturally boosted transportation and the economy in this region.

Until recently Kleinzee was still one of the largest suppliers of alluvial diamonds in South Africa and transport remains a problem in this remote area.

2. ROAD TRANSPORT

The first road from Port Nolloth to Kleinzee was merely a track in the sand opened up by ox wagons and later donkey carts. It was unthinkable that a motor car or lorry could make the journey. In 1924, when Jack Carstens first went to Kleinzee to prospect for diamonds, he hired a lorry and was accompanied by a local inhabitant, Jurie Kotze, who developed a technique for tackling the road by which the battle could be won:

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“Deflate the tyres, never, even in the most desperate sandy circumstances uphill, plunge into lower gear and, if you can keep under way, you’ll get through.”

They were able to cover the 64 kilometres successfully after Carstens “had to lend a shoulder to the lorry to help the tyres grip” a few times. He learnt that if you disregarded the low gear maxim, you would find your car dug in up to its axles and all that you could do, was to wait for a span of Namaqualand donkeys to pull you out.²

When production was started at Kleinzee they needed vehicles, machinery and roads. It was especially important to have a good road transport system, and this the mining company and Jack Carstens realised when they started operating at this mining town. They purchased petrol locally at Port Nolloth “in cases obtained through the Atlantic Refining Company at 18/- per case landed at Port Nolloth”.³

In the same year the road from Kleinzee to Port Nolloth was inspected by J de G Genis, a member of the local Divisional Council, and in his final report he said (spelling unchanged):

“Dit is om te certivicier dat ek die pad van Kleinzee na Port Nolloth geïnspekteerd had saam moet Herr Behrmann en mnr J Carstens en lat ek die twee (2) verlegings goed keur. Die kort draaie sal ook reg uit gemaak word soo ver as moegelik.”⁴

At a meeting of the Mining Board of Directors of the Cape Coast Exploration Company (CCE) which initially managed Kleinzee the chairman stated that it was considered desirable to construct a road from Kleinzee to Port Nolloth, and it was estimated that the cost of this would approximately be £1 200. The sanction of the Divisional Council would be obtained before work was commenced. The expenditure for this road construction was authorised.⁵

Jack Carstens, the man credited with having started the diamond rush along Namaqualand’s coast, was responsible for getting the heavy mining plant into Kleinzee, probably about 1928. To do so he built a hard road for five kilometres over the sand dunes. He placed more than a metre of limestone on top of the sand, put 60 cm of red clay over that, and rolled it by means of the wheels of a loaded lorry. His cost of £1 000 per mile at this stage seems very reasonable. He was undoubtedly fortunate that they did not get much rain Kleinzee-way, with all that clay as a wearing course.⁶

2 Jack Carstens, *A fortune through my fingers* (Cape Town, 1962), pp. 72-73.

2 De Beers Archives (Kimberley). Hans Merensky Association File 2.4 (hereafter referred to as HMA 2.4), De Beers-VLM Wilson, Alexander Bay, 5 October 1928

3 *Ibid.* General Manager Namaqualand Mines Kleinzee, File 1 (hereafter referred to as *GM. NMK I*). Report by J de G Genis (Divisional Council), 27 November 1928.

4 *Ibid.* Cape Coast Exploration Company Limited (hereafter referred to as CCE). Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 16 November 1928.

6 Carstens, p. 94; GLD Ross, *Namaqualand a transportation-related chronology* (Somerset West, 1996).

It was important that the roads to Kleinzee should not be accessible to private road transport/vehicles. The Company was not able to immediately obtain permission for this from the Cape Administrator. In 1930 there was still a delay relating to the publication of the proclamation formally closing this road. Until such publication the Manager of Kleinzee, Mr H Behrmann, was informed that it would not be possible to formally close the road. The assistance of Mr Hein Becker in connection with road matters was obtained in 1930. He had an interview with the Administrator early in 1930 and it was the administration's invariable practice to give their own description of the road to be closed, "since it frequently happens that the beacons which apply to such closure, refer to trees and buildings which in their nature are perishable with time". He promised, however, to obtain the necessary information without delay, and advise them.⁷

Following the proclamation of the Grootmist road closure in the Gazette of the 21st of March (Grootmist is situated a few kilometres from Kleinzee), the road was closed by Manager LJ Parkinson. On the 1st of April, in accordance with CCE chairman Dickinson's instructions, the supposed private road which passed in front of the former house of the Manager, was closed by locking the southern gate.

Within an hour of the gate being locked, Kleinzee's Manager was visited by Mr Genis of the Divisional Council and instructed to open the gate. This Parkinson refused to do, claiming that it was a private road. When Genis left he warned that at the next meeting of the Divisional Council on the 10th of April he would arrange to bring suit against the Company to force the opening of the road.

In the meantime Captain WET Crowder, head of Security at Kleinzee, obtained signed documents from three local farmers to the effect that the road was a private one. Parkinson nevertheless feared that under oath in the witness box their witnesses would probably change their testimony. Added to this, the only people who would testify that the road was a private one were those farmers who were employed by the Company or who had members of their family working for CCE.

On the 2nd of April Parkinson was visited by Messrs PH (Pieter) de Villiers (a well-known school principal at Grootmist) and Kotze, a member of the Divisional Council. De Villiers stated that he had come at the request of nine farmers who had appeared at his house that same morning. These two men aired the same arguments as Genis the previous day and asked for the gate to be unlocked. Several dire predictions as to what would be the outcome of a suit were made by both men. Manager Parkinson still refused to open the gate.

Captain Crowder then called Parkinson aside and told him that he had that morning interviewed several more old employees who had been residents there for

7 *GM. NMK 2.* Hein Becker–Cape Coast Exploration Ltd. (Johannesburg), 5 February 1930; Hein Becker–H Behrmann, 8 February 1930; *CCE 2.* Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 21 November 1930.

years. Each of them had told him that the road was a public one. Crowder finally changed his mind and agreed that there was a small chance of them winning the suit, if it should come to that.

Parkinson therefore decided to compromise and open the gate for the time being, thus departing from instructions given to him by Mr Dickinson of the Cape Coast Exploration (CCE). In his report to the CCE Parkinson said that it undoubtedly appeared to be a weak action but that he had made the best of a bad situation and it was in the Company's best interest. He reported that he would appeal to the Divisional Council at their meeting on the 10th of April to declare the road a private one. The Divisional Council insisted that the fact that this road was a public one had been pointed out to Col Davidson and former Manager Behrmann at the time that the Grootmist road was up for discussion and they claimed that the Company had acted in bad faith by not applying to have the road closed and ignoring the Divisional Council and closing the road after having been informed that it was a public one. Parkinson intended to point out, as had already been done in private conversation, that it was obvious that the Company had always known that the road had to be closed since it gave the public access to the front of their workmen's camp, and the fact that they did not ask for its closure clearly shows that they acted in good faith "and thought and think it is a private road".⁸

Parkinson believed, at this stage, that the Company probably would not begin to operate while this road was open to the public, and, as a consequence, approximately 150 local men would be thrown out of employment until the road could be closed, thus increasing the poverty and hardships of their friends and relatives. If they would then refuse to rule this road a private one there would be two courses of action open to them. They could either lock the gate again or apply for the road to be closed or deviated. Parkinson was sure that they would lose this suit, in which case it would be impossible to obtain its closure or deviation. Moreover: "It is difficult to express how bitter is the public feeling on this subject which exists here, in Springbok, and ... in other parts that I have not visited. This feeling would be intensified if we were to 'flaunt' the Divisional Council and bring the matter to court."⁹

The better option would be to apply for the road to be closed or deviated. Judging from the history of the Grootmist road closing, it would, according to Parkinson, require at least six months in which to settle the matter. In the meantime they were in a rather uncertain position as regards operating and would have to employ guards to constantly patrol the front of the workmen's camp.

In the meantime it was brought to Parkinson's attention that in the event of the Divisional Council refusing to close or deviate the road, the Provincial Ad-

8 *GM. NMK 2*. LJ Parkinson (Manager Kleinzee)–Secretary CCE (Johannesburg), 2 April 1930.

9 *Ibid.* LJ Parkinson–Secretary CCD (Johannesburg), 2 April 1930.

ministrator was in the position to overrule them. Parkinson believed that they would have a very good chance of getting the required action by the Cape Administrator, JS Smit. He concluded:

“My private opinion is that although the road has been and is rarely travelled on, it is technically and legally a public road and that we will lose our case if the matter should come to court.”¹⁰

After the meeting of the Divisional Council on 10 April 1930 it became apparent that the Council was divided on the issue of closing the gate at Kleinzee. The division was almost 50:50 but Parkinson realised that the school teacher, De Villiers, was a “power in the Division (and) that they seem unable to overrule him”. Should the Company not accept De Villiers’ idea of opening the road through Kleinzee Annex (Kleinzee Annex is situated very near to Kleinzee and is the actual main mining part of Kleinzee) another thing they could do was to apply to the Divisional Council to have the road deproclaimed. If they should take this course, Parkinson reported they should first send Jack Carstens through the countryside to sign up all the farmers to the effect that they had no objection to closing the road. Otherwise De Villiers would sign them all to a petition to the opposite effect.

As far as the road across Kleinzee Annex is concerned Parkinson reasoned that it would not make much difference. The main road already passed within a few hundred yards of the Crater. And, “as long as we have guards there the opening of the second road should make no difference. It is only the principle of the thing that I detest. It seems ridiculous for us to have to knuckle under to a crooked country school teacher in his slightest whim. But we must face facts and there is no doubt that he is a tremendously important man in Namaqualand.”¹¹

The dispute over the closure of the road at Kleinzee was eventually settled through an agreement between Parkinson and Pieter de Villiers for a road deviation. Consequently the issue of the road closure was resolved and for the next seven years the question was not raised again. In 1937 the deproclamation and closure of the Kleinzee roads once more became an issue. (This matter is more fully discussed later in this article.)

At an early stage of Kleinzee’s history it was evident that floods were detrimental for the maintenance of roads leading to the town. In 1930 it was mentioned that the river was passable by lorries, but it was still flowing to a depth of 13 to 20 centimetre. They did not believe that anything could be done about a hard road bed until the flow had stopped.¹² A month later it was reported: “Since the flood the road has been changed in two or three places.”¹³

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.* LJ Parkinson (Manager Kleinzee)–Secretary CCE, 14 April 1930.

12 *Ibid.* Parkinson (Manager Kleinzee)–HT Dickinson (CCE), 8 October 1930.

13 *Ibid.* Parkinson–HT Dickinson, CCE, 15 November 1930.

It was usually the river road which caused problems during floods. CCE's Dickinson was glad to note in 1930 that Manager Humphries had repaired this road, as the crossing was very difficult the previous time that he had passed over it. Dickinson believed that if they laid down a foundation of boulders, "the road would stand up to any future floods". In the same year the Manager reported that hard roads of tailings material had been constructed between all important points between the "works and camp".¹⁴

The next year, 1932, it was agreed that the Manager could purchase a new car for use at Kleinzee. The Secretary reported to the board of the CCE that Manager Humphreys, whilst proceeding on leave to Kimberley, had bought a touring Chevrolet car, which was in a very dilapidated condition. This car was traded in for £50 against the purchase of a new Ford 8 cylinder Sedan, to which "the new type of air wheel" had been fitted. The total cost of this new car was £315.¹⁵ With this new car at his disposal, Humphreys was now able and ready to take on the rough roads around Kleinzee in his brand new 8 cylinder.

In 1934 the Divisional Council of Namaqualand decided to spend a sum of £10 on repairing the Kleinzee/Port Nolloth road and they asked whether the Company would be prepared to contribute a further £5 for this purpose. The Company eventually decided to make this contribution.¹⁶ It was not always willing to spend money on the maintenance of roads by the Divisional Council. When the Council asked whether the Company would contribute £200 annually towards the costs of repairs to and maintenance of the Kleinzee/Port Nolloth road in 1935, they refused to help. The Company, however, decided that should operations be resumed at Kleinzee, they could well afford to spend a few hundred pounds on the necessary repairs which would be under the direct supervision of the mine officials and not of the Namaqualand Divisional Council.¹⁷

Due to the lack of a rail link north of Bitterfontein Jack Carstens had to build a road across the sand to get heavy machinery in when it was decided to mechanise the operations,¹⁸ but here the expansion of economic operations warranted the investment in a transportation facility and not the other way around. Road improvements were in line with general improvements in the rest of the country, and were not always essential components of the mining development. In diamond mining the provision of transportation links again followed the development of the economy, and was not the cause of that development.¹⁹

14 *Ibid.* HT Dickinson (Secretary CCE, Johannesburg)–F Humphreys (Manager Kleinzee), 23 April 1931; CCE, Fourth Report and Accounts for the year ended 30th June 1931. Road Transport.

15 CCE 2. Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 13 December 1932.

16 *Ibid.* Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 19 March and 17 April 1934.

17 *Ibid.* Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 17 September and 19 November 1935.

18 Carstens, p. 94.

19 Ross, p. 9.19.

There remains uncertainty as to when Bitterfontein was first used as the northern terminal for passengers and post, as some authorities say that the post car continued to run from Klawer with post and passengers for a year or so after the opening of the railway station by Minister Charlie Malan.²⁰

Why the railway comes to a sudden and rather disconcerting stop at Bitterfontein remains uncertain. Various tales, some rather scandalous and not backed by recorded facts, circulate in the region, but no clear reason is recorded. There is no doubt that there was considerable pressure from Namaqualanders for the line to be extended, with a history of deputations to the powers-that-be dating back to 1915.²¹

At the hearings of the Commission of Inquiry into road motor transportation in 1945 the Member of Parliament for Namaqualand, Colonel Willem Booyen, petitioned for an extension of the line through Namaqualand to link with the South West African (Namibian) line at Karasburg. However, JD du Plessis & Co. (Joe Jowell, owner) and an organisation known as the Namaqualand Transport Operators' Association (Joe Jowell, spokesman) argued against the extension, claiming that the successful pioneering efforts of the road transport operators gave them the right to continue providing this essential service without competition from the railways. The Commission apparently agreed.²²

In 1947 the Member of the Provincial Council for Namaqualand, Daantjie Scholtz, published an 11 page brochure which showed the benefits which such an extension of the railway line would have for Namaqualand, and for the railways.²³ Scholtz's submissions in this regard (which unfortunately met with no success) showed that had construction of the rail been continued north of Bitterfontein at that time, it would have been beneficial to the economy of the region, at least in the short term.

There would then of course not have been the same pressure for the local inhabitants to initiate private road transport in 1930, with the result that the economic benefits flowing from running road transport operations would not have accrued to the community. Also, when in the 1980s the swing from rail to road transport became economically logical, there would possibly not have been the same strong local road transport on which to build.

Things have a way of averaging or evening out over time, and it appears probable that the effect of the economy of this region, where the mining output is controlled by market demand, would in the long run have been much the same whether the rail had been extended or not.

20 Interview GLD Ross-Joe (Bill) Rabinowitz, 1993.

21 Phyllis Jowell, *Joe Jowell of Namaqualand* (Fernwood Press, Vlaeberg, 1994), p. 136.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 136-139 and 202.

23 DJ Schotz, *Die verlenging van die spoorweg deur Namakwaland* (Brochure) (s.a., s.l.).

One thing is quite clear: however beneficial the construction of the railway through the region might have been in the railway era, in 2000 there can be no call for rail to replace road in Namaqualand. With good roads and modern transport vehicles Namaqualand's present-day transport needs are better served by road transport than they would be by the level of rail service offered elsewhere in the Republic.²⁴

Today the rail has still not progressed further north into Namaqualand. In fact, with the improvements to the road system and to road truck efficiencies, and with the easing of Road Transport Board restrictions, road transport is taking over from this railway line also. The drop off in rail traffic has been so great that it was found expedient to close the station at Bitterfontein on 15 November 1993 and these fine buildings, built 20 years earlier, now stand empty and unused.

Only full rail-truck loads, that is to say basically only copper from Namaqualand and granite blocks from north of Bitterfontein south-bound, and coal and fuel north-bound, use this section of rail now.²⁵

With the absence of rail links in and around Kleinsee in 1926 they indeed found it difficult to run a diamond mine effectively and the only solution was to improve their road links with the outside world. The tardy reaction of the Hertzog Government (the only body at that time with sufficient resources to be effective) to the need for an adequate road link from the mines to the export anchorage inhibited the economic development of the region at a critical period in its history. Luckily a road motor service was introduced to serve Namaqualand and people like Joe Jowell came to the rescue of the mining community of this region by providing the necessary service.²⁶

In the early years Kleinsee needed effective road links with the following regions:

- Springbok via Spektakel Pass (this was their link with "civilization" and their main gateway to import machinery and other necessary goods which they needed for the mine at Kleinsee).
- Port Nolloth (their nearest town and their postal point. Many goods went through Springbok to the Port from where the Company transported it to Kleinsee. They also imported heavier supplies like cement and sugar by way of marine transport). In 1936 they had two lorries at Kleinsee - one for transporting general goods and foodstuffs from Port Nolloth and a second one for sanitary removals in the camp. On these roads and in these conditions one

24 Ross, pp. 4.35-4.36 and 9.35-9.36.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 4.37; Interview GLD Ross—Danie Rossouw, 1994.

26 Ross, pp. 9.36-9.37.

is not surprised that in 1936 the lorry which had been purchased in 1929 came to the end of its lifespan and had to be traded in on a new one.²⁷

- Neighbouring settlements which supplied labourers for the mine (settlements like Steinkopf, Komaggas, etc.). The demand for better roads naturally increased when the supply of labour from these towns to Namaqualand Mines also increased. Over the years the Company was never hesitant to improve these roads, although today one is amazed that the links with Springbok and Port Nolloth are still gravel roads.

The principal roads from Kleinzee were constructed as follows:

- 1928: Kleinzee-Buffels (clay surface): Constructed by Jack Carstens.
- 1967: Kleinzee-Gemsbokvlei (gravel surface): Constructed by Murray and Stewart.
- 1981: Kleinzee-Koingnaas (bitumen surface): LTA Construction.
- 1981: Spektakel Pass (gravel surface): Divisional Council.⁵⁸

The regular users of the gravel roads in and around Kleinzee soon realised that vehicles had a limited life time on these surfaces. Security man, Redmond Orpen, had a Standard Chevrolet Tourer which had been purchased in July 1934 and had done over 40 000 kilometres in less than two years and Acting Manager Victor Wilson was anxious to trade it in “as it has developed cracks in the chassis on both sides and it is essential that Mr Orpen should have a car on which he can depend for his long trips”.²⁹ Requests like these always seemed to receive a sympathetic ear from the Company and usually these vehicles were replaced.

It was during 1937 that the matter of the road closure and deproclamation of the Kleinzee roads once more became an issue. In October it was reported that the Commandant of Police of the Namaqualand Division was at Kleinzee “some time ago” and he was anxious at that stage to have all public roads across this mining town closed. Moreover: his Department would be willing to approach the Provincial Authorities in this connection. If this would be done it would be necessary for the Company to build new police barracks at its gate on the “present main road to the Southern Boundary”. It would then be unnecessary for the police to cross any part of Kleinzee to have access to the Police Station.

The cost of building new police barracks and providing a water pipeline would be about £2 000. This, however, would not all be extra expenditure, because additional single quarters were badly needed and the hospital could be used for that

27 *GM. NMK 5*. Victor Wilson—Secretary CCE (Kimberley), 20 August 1936.

58 Ross, pp. 6.54 and 6.55.

29 *GM. NMK, 6*. Wilson—Secretary CCE, 24 March 1937.

purpose, thus saving the cost of constructing additional single quarters. The police barracks and auxiliary buildings could be converted into a hospital, a dispensary and orderlies' quarters and also provide for black patients, whilst the compound fences could be extended to include the hospital, thus preventing contact with outsiders by persons travelling between the compound and the hospital. The X-ray plant could also be in the same block.

The Directors authorised the Manager to inform the Police that, provided that the closing of the roads would be effected, the Company agreed to construct the new Police Station.³⁰

In December 1937 Manager Pifer *inter alia* wrote to the Secretary of the CCE in Kimberley:

"I have discussed the position with Major Pannall in the light of the legal view that the old road, though closed, is still officially a public road. He assures me that the manner in which the police asking for our roads to be closed is such that the road will be automatically included in the application to the Divisional Council. They are asking that all roads and footpaths on Kleinzee and Kleinzee Annex be closed as public roads and there be opened in substitute therefore a road beginning just north of the gate on the Van der Stel road at the north boundary of Kleinzee Annex and proceeding easterly to a public road running outside and east of the boundaries of the two farms which crosses the closed roads just south of Kleinzee's southern boundary. In other words, all public roads wherever they are across these farms will be closed by one proclamation rather than one at a time with a repetition of all the attendant difficulties with each one. Further, if the roads are closed piecemeal the strongest argument, in fact the only argument, the police have, that of protection, will be vitiated."³¹

Pifer added that Pieter de Villiers "has fallen out with his friends of those days who were on the (Divisional) Council". He feared that publicly drawing attention to this bit of deviated road by requesting closure, would only point out their unsatisfactory position to local enemies who might proceed to cause what trouble they can.³²

In August 1938, the Company awaited the deproclamation of the Kleinzee roads. A correct description of the roads had been forwarded from Cape Town to the Namaqualand Divisional Council. The next step was the insertion of the required advertisements in English and Afrikaans newspapers and the Provincial Gazette. They also awaited any possible objections by the Divisional Council.

Pifer saw De Villiers and assured him that the Company contemplated no action toward prohibiting the people of Grootmist from crossing Annex Kleinzee to the ocean and would only avail themselves of the closure of the minable parts of Kleinzee. He emphasised that the Police were the motivating power behind the scheme.³³ Eventually, in 1940, a deputation of the Divisional Council (at the cost of

30 CCE 2. Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 19 October 1937.

31 GM, NMK 6. Pifer–Secretary CCE, 23 December 1937.

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.* Parkinson (CCE, Kimberley)–Manager Kleinzee, 15 August 1938; Pifer–Consulting Engineers CCE, 26 September 1938.

the Company) inspected the roads which were being considered for closure.³⁴ After a long delay the Cape Provincial Council resolved to authorise the closing of the roads across the farms Kleinzee and Annex Kleinzee and a proclamation to this effect appeared in the Provincial Gazette of 16 August 1940.³⁵

Towards the end of 1940 the cost of repairs to the coastal road between Kleinzee and Port Nolloth once more came to the fore. Victor Wilson, the Acting Manager, informed the CCE that the road was in such a bad state that they did not allow their cars and lorries to use it; instead they used what is known as the upper road, which was 6,5 kilometres longer but had a better surface. Wilson consequently advised the Divisional Council not to repair the coastal road but rather to focus their attention on the upper road.³⁶

During these years it was not easy for employees of Namaqualand Mines, in vacation times or for whatever reason, to take to the roads to Cape Town or elsewhere. The roads were in a terrible condition.

In 1937, Drury Pifer, the new American Manager of Kleinzee, and his family were on their way to their new home. His son describes their trip:

“We dashed out of Klawer at very high speeds on gravel roads that quickly degenerated into a hard dirt rut cut by deep transverse corrugations. Driving at a reasonable speed was not practical, because the corrugations set up a vibration so violent that it rattled teeth, cracked shock absorbers and broke axles. ... The farther north we drove, the more often the road vanished under drifting dunes. Approaching heaps of sand that rose higher than houses, dad would slow slightly, then floor the accelerator, gauging his forward momentum to carry us over the crest. A fine, choking dust churned up through the floorboards. ... Soon everyone was sick...”³⁷

Pifer used to borrow a Lincoln Zephyr and more often than not it left them in the lurch. Then the family had to sit and wait while Pifer walked 16 or 30 kilometres in the baking sun to fetch help. The family shovelled a hole underneath the car where they could find some shade. It was better to travel at night, but still the car broke down. Pifer would return with a vehicle - usually a grease-saturated garage truck or a motorcycle with a sidecar - to pick them up and take them to Bitterfontein or another station to board the train. The garages in that area never had parts for a Lincoln Zephyr.³⁸

In the official Gazette of 24 March 1944 the Kleinzee/Port Nolloth road was declared a Divisional Road, and the Divisional Council immediately intended to start with the construction of the road. They told the new Manager of Kleinzee,

34 The members of this deputation were Messrs. Gordon (chairman), Fritz, Scholtz, Kotze and Genis. They visited Kleinzee on 17 January 1940. *GM. NMK 6*. Pifer-Consulting Engineers CCE, 24 November 1938; *CCE 3*. Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 12 December 1939 and 18 January 1940.

35 *CCE 3*. Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 20 August 1940.

36 *GM. NMK 7*. Wilson-Secretary CCE, 30 September 1940.

37 D Pifer, *Innocents in Africa* (Granta Books, London, 1995), pp. 97-98.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

Mr R Turner (June 1943-April 1944), that practically a new road would be built, and they asked the Company to contribute £2 000 towards the construction of the road. After contributing to the maintenance and rebuilding of this road Manager Pieter Louwrens (May 1944-March 1945) was dissatisfied with the job done by the Council and he informed them that “at present the road merely follows the surface of the country with the result that it is a ‘switchback’ of numerous dips and rises”. He added: “So far as the surface of the road is concerned we are satisfied but the ‘switchback’ effect will lead to the formation of pot-holes and it is impossible to drive over it, as it is at present, at more than 30 miles (ca. 50 kilometres) per hour with any safety.”³⁹

In June 1944 the road to Port Nolloth was progressing satisfactorily and it was eight kilometres long, starting from Grootmist. The surface was good and hard. Advantage was taken of the recent rains to consolidate the road by means of a heavy roller. It was reported: “The road is on the ridge of the range of hills running parallel to the sea, about 5 kilometres from it, and there seems every hope that the troublesome sandy patches will be bypassed.” At that stage they had 237 trucks/lorries at Kleinzee of which 16 needed repair.⁴⁰

The old-timers relate that the tar road at that time started at Clanwilliam; for the rest you had to be content with the bad gravel roads of Namaqualand. If you travelled from Springbok to Pofadder you also crossed a terrible road. For those who did not have the luxury of a car the Security Department came to the rescue and took them to Springbok (by security vehicles) from where they travelled by bus or air to their destination at Kleinzee or Alexander Bay from where they caught air flights to Cape Town (at one stage by a Skymaster). Whenever workers went on vacation they received travel bonuses - for the husband, the wife and for each child. The road to Springbok via Spektakel Pass was really in a bad condition. Johnny Scherman (now retired at Stellenbosch) says that they drove 2,5 hours to complete the 100 kilometres to Springbok and that the road was so terrible that they lost their roof racks. It was habitual for their cars to overheat when crawling up Spektakel Mountain. Halfway to the top was a milkwood tree where they drove off the road for the vehicle to cool down, put stones behind the wheels, added water and then got started again. It was customary for them to take their water and cool-bag with. On the southern trips they usually stayed over at Garies, while on the eastern trips they slept over at Pofadder. Maintaining the vehicles using those roads was quite a job. The saying was that if you went anywhere, you should not forget your “bloudraad

39 *GM. NMK 7. CPA Louwrens-J Gordon (Springbok), 21 June 1944.*

40 *Ibid. Weekly Reports to CCE, 14 June and 13 September 1944.*

and tang” (galvanised wire and pliers) to fix exhaust-pipes falling off or any other car trouble.⁴¹

Paddy Marx (Wilson) (now living at Cape Town) who lived in Kleinzee during the very early years also refers to Spektakel Pass as a hair-raising experience. It was steep, windy and gravelled. They had to go up Spektakel in second gear and it took them 13 hours travelling time to Cape Town. In those years the first tarred road they got was at Malmesbury. The gravel road had terrible corrugations and sand. They often got stuck in the sand. They had to deflate the tyres a little, dig under the wheels, put “bossies” (bushes) underneath and everyone who was not the driver had to push until the car got out of the sand.⁴²

Spektakel Pass had a very narrow road, and only one car could pass at a time. When travelling along this road it seemed to take ages to reach your destination, according to some old-timers. Whenever a car was approaching you had to wait and let it pass. To make things worse it often happened that the road had been washed away and eroded, with small ditches caused by water from the “koppies” (hillocks). Naturally many accidents happened on these roads, like that of the Volkswagen Kombi which overturned, killing five people. Brian Magarth, an ex-GM, believes that many accidents occur on these roads because people from elsewhere are not used to driving on dirt roads.⁴³ Gillian van Lingen remembers once being amused to see a cyclist flying downhill in a cloud of dust with a huge dead thorn tree tied behind!⁴⁴

This central route via Spektakel Pass was first constructed by the Divisional Council in 1896. The Council reconstructed the pass to an improved gradient in 1981 at a cost of one million rand: it was said to be “the biggest job ever done by a DC”.⁴⁵

The gravel road to Springbok was never tarred. Even today people are surprised when travelling to Kleinzee to find that they have to travel along a bad 100 kilometre dirt road to De Beers’ Namaqualand Mines. Speaking to recent ex-general managers (GMs) they say that this road was a bone of contention for many years. They brought it up a number of times and car counts were held. De Beers often asked for that road and the road to Port Nolloth to be tarred, but it was never done. The authorities said that it was not worthwhile.⁴⁶ Another ex-GM says

41 *NM 14/1, 22/1, 28/1 and 71/1.* Interviews with Johnny Scherman (Stellenbosch), Stemmie and Rita Stemmet (Somerset West), Ronald Davies (Somerset West) and Johan Stemmet (Bloemfontein), 30 June, 4 July 1997, 10 January and 22 July 1998.

42 *NM 12/1.* Interview with Paddy Marx, Lakeside, 4 July 1997.

43 *NM 14/1, 51/1 and 73/1.* Interviews with Johnny Scherman (Stellenbosch), Brian and Margot Magarth (Somerset West) and Johnson Madikane (Kleinzee), 30 June 1997, 20 February and 8 December 1998.

44 *NM 70/2.* Interview with Gillian van Lingen, Walvis Bay, 20 August 1998.

45 Ross, p. 6.12.

46 *NM 51/1.* Interview with Brian Magarth, Somerset West, 20 February 1998.

that the road to Springbok will always be a gravel road. Throughout the history of Namaqualand Mines and certainly between 1995 and 1997 there was much pressure to get one of the roads tarred. Many promises were made by provincial authorities. Although they are sympathetic there is never enough money and political reason to do so. The Port Nolloth/Alexander Bay road was tarred for military and strategic reasons and for nothing else.⁴⁷

Over the years floods were always a problem on these untarred roads. As recent as 1997 Kleinzee was isolated from the outside world due to the great flood of that year. In earlier years before they tarred the road to Koingnaas the school buses often got stuck on this road. When the children came home from Cape Town the roads were sometimes muddy. That was quite a disaster and a scary time for the parents. They had to get the Koingnaas people out when their bus got stuck, and get other vehicles to fetch the children. All the parents were panicking on such occasions and the telephones never stopped ringing.⁴⁸ When the children were on their way to school they naturally did not mind missing a few hours in the classroom. For many years this road to Koingnaas was a problem, especially for the transport of children and teaching staff on a daily basis. Apart from being muddy, maintenance of this road was often required. Every second year they had to put a layer of slurry on the road to bind it.⁴⁹ There were many potholes and subsidence of the ground and eventually they had to consider tarring the road.

Kleinzee is 65 kilometres from Koingnaas. By 1979 the existing calcrete road which the mine had built to gravel standards was carrying a large amount of traffic, despite the fact that it lies entirely within the security area. Anglo American/De Beers wanted to give the road a permanent surface – cheaply. Keeve Steyn carried out various experiments and built a short test section, using the intended construction method. As the result still looked good after a short trial period, they entered into a contract with LTA Construction.

The 65 kilometres were surfaced in the amazingly short time of 15 weeks, from January to mid-May 1981, at a cost of about R30 000 per kilometre. LTA used a cycle of 22 days continuous working followed by six days off.

The existing calcrete road was shaped by eye and compacted, then covered with 10 cm to 25 cm layers of hard calcrete, depending on the original road material. Sea water was used for compaction, and to limit the transmigration of salts to the surface (where they would interfere with the blacktop) the sub-base had to be covered within two weeks and the base course surfaced within one week. No prime coat was applied, the surfacing consisting of an emulsion tack coat plus the “left over chips” from the mine’s stone crusher product after stone required for concrete

47 *NM 66/2*. Interview with Richard Molyneux, Kimberley, 12 May 1998.

48 *NM 35/1*. Interview with Dorothy Eyre, Yzerfontein, 15 January 1998.

49 *NM 38/1*. Interview with Pieter and Janetta van Zyl, Lamberts Bay, 17 January 1998.

had been removed. The maintenance treatment (other than on-going patching) was a fog spray after three years, a reseal after six years and every six years thereafter.⁵⁰

Two years earlier, in 1979, De Beers constructed the 42 kilometre private road from Komaggas to Kleinzee to facilitate the daily transport of workers. At that stage a total of 300 Komaggas residents worked and resided in Kleinzee. This project, which the Komaggas Control Board found very attractive, carried with it advantages for both Kleinzee and Komaggas alike. Employees who used to reside in single quarters were enabled to live at home with their families and participate in community activities. The Company, on the other hand, was able to create a more loyal and satisfied employee by providing a home ownership scheme and, if the town developed thereby, it could attract more job-seekers.⁵¹

The seventies was also important for the community of Kleinzee, because early in this decade it was decided to tar the roads in the town. The tarring of these roads were completed in 1972.⁵²

Formerly, in 1967, it had been decided to add an extra 0,9 mile (1,44 kilometre) to the Kleinzee/Port Nolloth road including a low-level causeway across the Buffels River; “this last stretch of road with the causeway ensures a good final approach to the mine gate”. This followed the decision a year earlier to construct a new access road to Kleinzee from the Port Nolloth/Springbok road to replace the old road “which has been reduced to virtually a track from repeated grading with consequent damage to transport and other vehicles, and which runs dangerously close to the rich mining areas”.⁵³

In 1983 kerbing for the entire town of Kleinzee was completed and numerous stop signs in town were changed to yield signs to improve traffic flow. Speed dips in the town which were regarded by road users as being dangerous were made shallower. The entrance to town from Springbok was widened to accommodate two-way traffic and a section of 100 metres of gravel road was tarred to improve the entrance to town. At Koingnaas the kerbing programme was completed as planned and in both Koingnaas and Kleinzee the planned tarring programmes were completed.⁵⁴

Fleet management and vehicle maintenance received special attention in 1987.

The implementation of the computerised vehicle maintenance modules using the Cybergem System commenced during October 1987. Aspects such as vehicle

50 Ross, pp. 6.39-6.40.

51 *Ibid.*, p.6.39; *Cape Coast Chronicle*, June 1979.

52 *NM Chronicle*, October 1998.

53 De Beers Archives (Kimberley). Cape Coast Exploration Limited (Later Namaqualand Division of Mines 1926-67). *Microfilm 27A* (Hereafter only referred to as *CCE/NM Microfilm*). Col. R Daniel–Secretary De Beers, 21 March 1967 and 14 March 1966.

54 Namaqualand Mines Annual Report 1983 (Hereafter referred to as Annual Reports).

specification, maintenance scheduling and history, vehicle costing and vehicle allocation were addressed.

A project was also initiated to rationalise the size of the on-highway vehicle fleet at NM. Aspects considered during this project hinged upon:

- reducing the fleet size;
- reducing the number of 4,4 light delivery vehicles in use;
- reducing fuel, maintenance and replacement costs.

Continued use of salvageable components from scrapped vehicles assisted significantly in extending vehicle life and reducing costs. The concept of re-furbishing rather than replacing was once again undertaken on the larger on-highway vehicles.

An amount of R25 000 was set aside in the budget for expenditure during 1988, to investigate and test non-corrosive products such as fibreglass, plastic and polyurethane on light vehicles, particularly on the bodies and undercarriages.⁵⁵

In the same year the section of road outside the Personnel Offices in Third Street was reconstructed as a result of base foundation collapse. Tarring work around the hostels in Koingnaas was completed and the service road in Koingnaas was constructed and tarred.

A year later the Cybergem maintenance Management System, introduced into the Transport section in 1987, was further developed into a workable and constructive information tool. Aspects such as vehicle specification and costs, maintenance scheduling and work history were addressed and useful information was now available.

The Transport Foreman obtained much assistance from the system. Obviously, the installation of desk top terminals in the foremen's offices, linked to the mainframe computer, was of considerable value.

It was reported that continued use of salvageable components from scrapped vehicles assisted significantly in extending vehicle life and reducing costs.

The tarred roads from First Street to Fourth Street were resealed using a slurry mix. The project was very successful, and except for Third Street, it was believed that it should keep the roads in an acceptable condition for another five years. Most of the activities of the roads gang were concentrated on pothole and cable trench repairs, as well as repairs to the beach, Komaggas and the airport gravel roads.⁵⁶

In 1990, it was reported that vehicle maintenance remained at a high standard and the condition of the fleet was good, considering that the fleet size was over 600 vehicles. The town garage was extended by one bay during the year, and

55 Annual Report 1987.

56 Annual Report 1988.

by relocating the Foreman's office and tearooms, additional space was gained within the existing workshop structure. A call-out shuttle system was introduced for use after hours in the bus/shuttle system. The roads from Fifth to Ninth Street and Checkpoint Drive in Kleinzee, and all the roads in the eastern township of Koingnaas were resealed.⁵⁷

The Koingnaas/Kleinzee road was repaired and resurfaced in 1995. The following year considerable road maintenance work was carried out in Koingnaas. This included the replacing of base material and resurfacing. An area of approximately 750 m² in front of the Kleinzee personnel offices was given tar stabilisation to reinforce the base material and to allow it to cope better with the high ground moisture percentage in that area.⁵⁸

In his extensive study, *The interactive role of transportation and the economy of Namaqualand*, Dr Graham Ross's research rightly showed that the economy of Namaqualand is reliant on adequate transportation. It was concluded that while transportation by river, sea, rail, road, air, pipeline and power line all played their part in building up the economy of the region, the dominant transportation mode, the one most essential to the region's future economic growth, is road transportation.⁵⁹

3. AIR TRANSPORT

Diamond mining, other than copper mining, from the start depended on the safest way of transport for their diamonds, and that was by way of air. As early as 18 June 1928 the possibility of the transport of diamonds by aeroplane was discussed in a letter of the first Manager, RH Adamson, to the Hans Merensky (HM) Association in Johannesburg. Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa discussed the possibility that the pilot could one week be accompanied by a government official and the following by an official of the HM Association. Special insurance would be necessary to cover the aviation risk.⁶⁰

On 27 June it became clear that the government intended to provide weekly flights from Alexander Bay and/or Port Nolloth to Cape Town and would accept diamonds of the HM Association for transport. It was arranged that the government would accept responsibility for the diamonds during the time that they were in transit until safe delivery to Mr AW Powell of Cape Town. It is interesting that Colonel Davidson (probably the Security Head of the HM Association) thought that the transport of the Association's diamonds by the government aeroplanes to Cape

57 Annual Report 1990.

58 Annual Reports 1995 and 1996.

59 Ross, p. 10.13.

60 HMA 5. Adamson–Secretaries HM Association, 18 June 1928; HMA 4. CDM Secretaries–PFW Beetz, 27 June 1928.

Town was an unnecessary expense and recommended that the arrangement with the government should be cancelled.

After discussion the secretaries of the HM Association were instructed to raise this question with the Government Mining Engineer in correspondence and later to interview him on the subject with a view to cancellation of the arrangement or a reduction of the charge made by the government.⁶¹

A definite agreement for the transportation of Kleinzee's diamonds was made in 1931. Mr Dickinson of the Cape Coast Exploration Company (CCE) in July reported on the steps which had been taken with a view to arranging safe transport of diamonds from Kleinzee. He arranged with Mr L van Zyl Ham that when the diamonds from the State Diggings at Alexander Bay were collected by aeroplane for transport to Cape Town, this plane should also call at Kleinzee and carry the Company's stores as well. It was understood that Van Zyl Ham was making the necessary arrangements with the Defence Department and the May and June parcels from Kleinzee would be transported to Cape Town as soon as the negotiations were brought to a conclusion.⁶²

The government was not satisfied that the aeroplane should first go to Kleinzee to take the diamonds and then proceed to Alexander Bay. The Defence Force was not willing to land at Kleinzee without a preparatory examination of the landing field. It was therefore arranged that for the first trip the plane would land at Port Nolloth, where they had to meet the pilot by car to take him to Kleinzee for the inspection of the airstrip. Then they had to take him back to the Port with the stock of diamonds, accompanied by a police escort. The aeroplane would then proceed to the State Diggings, returning directly to Cape Town (the Maitland⁶³ or Zwartkop Air Station) the following morning. The Kleinzee diamonds had to be packed ready for posting by registered mail at Cape Town Post Office addressed to the Company in Johannesburg. The CCE informed Manager Humphreys that arrangements would be made for the plane to be met by a representative of the Company on its arrival in Cape Town, who would take the diamonds directly to the post office and despatch them by registered post.⁶⁴

One can therefore safely assume that the transporting of diamonds via air commenced in 1931. In October the Board of Directors of the CCE reported the "payment of 70 pounds to the Department of Mines Industries for transporting diamonds from Kleinzee to Cape Town by aeroplane on 30th September, 1931".⁶⁵

61 HMA 4. CDM Secretaries–PFW Beetz, 27 June 1928; HMA: Resolutions. Minutes of Meeting of the HM Association, 17 September 1928.

62 CCE 2. Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 14 July 1931.

63 Maitland was the municipal aerodrome in Cape Town.

64 GM. NMK 3. HT Dickinson–F Humphreys, 21 July 1931.

65 CCE 2. Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 28 October 1931.

On 29 July 1931 Lt HJ Bronkhorst of the South African Air Force (SAAF) gave instructions in connection with the marking of an aerodrome at Kleinzee:

- The site selected is (a) portion of a salt pan known as Groot Pan, 14 kilometres north of Kleinzee Diggings and about one mile off the coast.
- The aerodrome had to be marked out by the Cape Coast Exploration Ltd. (CCE), on the position pointed out to the General Manager, the size not to be less than 500 metres by 500 metres, and the markings to be as explained. (A sketch was left with the Manager.)⁶⁶

This pan was, according to Manager Humphreys, very large, roughly three kilometres in diameter with a very fair surface and arrangements for the landing were made by him and the pilot.⁶⁷

In 1931 the CCE also asked Cook's Airways for a quotation for a trip by air from Cape Town to Port Nolloth.⁶⁸ In the meantime CCE's arrangement with the government was that their plane would only make the trip to the State Diggings (Alexander Bay) and to Kleinzee once in two months.⁶⁹ The aircraft used was a Wapiti plane and the pilot was Lt Fischer who knew flying conditions on the West Coast exceptionally well. Even the arms and ammunition the officers were allowed to carry were described. It was stipulated that in the case of forced landings the aircraft should not be left unguarded. As for the landing and other procedures at Kleinzee the following instructions were important and had to be carried out:

- When instructions have been given to a pilot either by a military authority or the diamond valuator to land at Kleinzee, this is to be done on the forward journey to Alexander Bay and then only if a smoke fire is burning. The absence of a smoke fire is a definite signal that the aerodrome is unfit for landing, but pilots must circle for a reasonable time to ensure that it is the intention not to light a fire.
- On landing at Kleinzee the aircraft will be met by a representative of the Cape Coast Exploration Company. Pilots are to keep their engines running and remain on the ground only long enough to take or hand over freight. Crews are *not* to leave their cockpits except in urgent circumstances.
- The Company has agreed that in the event of pilots being unable to take off as laid down in the previous subparagraph, they will provide adequate protection

66 *GM NMK 3*. Instructions in connection with the marking of an aerodrome at Kleinzee, 29 July 1931.

67 *Ibid.* F Humphreys–HT Dickinson, 3 August 1931.

68 *Ibid.*, 16 June 1931.

69 *GM NMK 2*. HT Dickinson–F Humphreys, 31 August 1931.

for the aircraft and crew. Pilots are therefore to apply to the Company for such assistance as may be required.

- An officer's responsibility for freight entrusted to him, begins when he leaves the ground and ends on landing and handing over to authorised mine officials, or representatives of the Kleinzee Company. When freight has been picked up at Kleinzee for delivery at Maitland, it is, on landing at Alexander Bay, to be handed over to the General Manager for safe custody. During this time the pilot will be relieved of responsibility.⁷⁰

These instructions had to be followed to the letter and there were occasions, as on 29 September 1931, when the plane did not land at Kleinzee "as there was no one at the aerodrome to meet it". As a result of this it was necessary for the Manager (Frank Humphreys) to take the diamonds, under escort, to Alexander Bay where they were picked up by the government plane.⁷¹ They later found that on that specific day they experienced abnormal weather conditions. The pilot, while proceeding over the pan, was unable to find the smoke fire and to identify the aerodrome.⁷² There was a repetition of this mistake on the 29th December 1931 and the Company was "very annoyed at the way arrangements miscarried".⁷³

Other problems also occurred with the despatching of diamonds. On the 29th March 1932 no less than 13 669 carats of diamonds were dispatched from Kleinzee by the government aircraft. It was reported that "these diamonds had been received in Kimberley, and after acidising and reweighing a loss of 19 carats had to be recorded".⁷⁴ It seems that the Company mainly used air transport for the safe transportation of their diamonds at this stage and that the possibility of transporting passengers by air was not given much thought.

In this report of March 1932, Redmond Orpen, Chief Security Officer at Kleinzee, wrote the following: "On the 29th, I accompanied the manager to the Company's aerodrome on the farm 'Dreyer's Pan' and saw the accumulated output delivered to the Air Force officer in charge of the aeroplane that awaited us there after having circled over Kleinzee on its way to the pan. As now, at the third attempt, the safety of this method of dealing with the transmission of the output has been demonstrated, further anxiety as to the safety of the output in transit has been entirely obviated, and the service should run smoothly in future."⁷⁵

70 *GM. NMK 3*. Air Transport of Diamonds. Alexander Bay–Cape Town. Standing Orders. Revised 21 August 1931: General Instructions.

71 *CCE 2*. Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 19 January 1932.

72 *GM. NMK 3*. J McNeight (for Secretary for Mines and Industries)–Secretaries CCE (Kimberley), 15 December 1931.

73 *GM. NMK 4*. Secretaries CCE–Manager Kleinzee, 11 January 1932.

74 *CCE 2*. Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 19 April 1932.

75 *GM. NMK 4*. Protection Report (R Orpen), March 1932.

Further instructions were given to pilots in 1932:

- The pilot is to fly over the Kleinzee Diggings making *not* less than two circuits at an altitude that will ensure his being sighted. He is then to fly to the aerodrome, examine the surface, make sure that the wind sleeve is in position on its pole and then land. The absence of the wind sleeve is a definite signal *not* to land. After landing the pilot is to taxi up to the wind sleeve pole and await the arrival of the Kleinzee officials. During this wait neither the pilot nor the mechanic is to leave the immediate vicinity of the aircraft and both must be on the alert.
- The Kleinzee officials should reach the aerodrome within 45 minutes of the aircraft circling the diggings and after receiving the parcels, the pilot is to take off immediately for Alexander Bay.
- If the officials do not arrive within an hour, the pilot is to take off and fly back towards Kleinzee keeping a look out for the transport. Should it be sighted on the way a second landing is to be made to wait for the officials but if nothing is seen the pilot is to make a circuit of the diggings and then set course for Alexander Bay.

It was furthermore stipulated:

When freight has been picked up at Kleinzee for delivery at Maitland, it is, on landing at Alexander Bay, to be handed over to the General Manager for safe custody. During this time the pilot will be relieved of responsibility.⁷⁶

A few weeks later there were further instructions:

- The Company was to erect on a pole 20 feet (about six metres) above ground, one of two wind sleeves which will be supplied by this office. The pole to be planted 10 metres outside the aerodrome boundary at the point at which the road from Kleinzee comes in.
- The Company was to undertake the periodical inspection of the wind sleeve and its replacement when necessary with the spare provided.
- Pilots will not land unless there is a wind sleeve in position.
- The Company was to inspect the aerodrome surface from time to time to ensure that its degree of hardness was not less than when the site was first selected and that there were no obstructions. Should the surface be considered unsafe the Company was to remove the wind sleeve.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Air Transport of Diamonds. Alexander Bay–Cape Town. Standing Orders (Revised 17 March 1932 by Colonel Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, Director of Air Services).

- The Company was to despatch its parcels to the aerodrome as soon as the aircraft circles the diggings.⁷⁷

In the same year it was found that the aerodrome at Kleinzee was not entirely satisfactory owing to the surface being too soft and also due to the prevalence of coastal fogs. In instances like this it was decided that at the next visit of the government plane to Kleinzee the pilot had to inspect other suitable sites for a more satisfactory aerodrome.⁷⁸

In terms of the Company's insurance policy it was laid down that diamonds had to be transported by car, but that other arrangements could be made if special rates could be arranged. After discussing the matter with the directors it was suggested that an aeroplane should be sent directly from Kimberley to fetch the diamonds, as a machine could be obtained for approximately £35 as against £70 charged by the Defence Department. The first such flight proceeded from Kimberley to Kleinzee on 18 August 1932. This arrangement probably continued for a time because in 1937 it was reported that diamonds "had been brought to Kimberley by aeroplane by Mr Parkinson on his return from his recent visit to the Fields".⁷⁹

In 1938 they were enlarging the Kleinzee landing field (about eight kilometres south of the town) to have eight full length runways. A year later, in June 1939, the Director of Civil Aviation issued a temporary licence to the Kleinzee Aerodrome, 6,4 kilometres south southwest of Kleinzee at Geel Pan. This area had to be kept free of unauthorised persons, vehicles and animals not under proper control.⁸⁰ Unfortunately the aerodrome was in such a bad state in March 1940 that it needed repairs on two patches and for a while it was unfit for landing and regarded as dangerous by the pilot, Captain Halse. These patches and the aerodrome were repaired within three months.⁸¹

During the war years (1939-1945) the aerodrome at Kleinzee seemed "hardly to be used for Government purposes" and the management decided to write to the Director of Civil Aviation suggesting that it should be allowed to lapse into disuse until after the war. Civil Aviation regarded the location of the Kleinzee aerodrome as "of material assistance to the Government in the pursuance of its present policy" in view of the regular air services to and from the Cape. Consequently the Company

77 *Ibid.* Capt. CW Meredith—Chief of General Staff, UDF, 22 March 1932.

78 *CCE 2.* Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 21 June 1932.

79 *Ibid.* Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors, 19 July 1932, 16 August 1932 and 19 October 1937.

80 *GM. NMK 6.* Manager Kleinzee—JC Grobler (Manager Alexander Bay State Diggings), 21 December 1938; De Beers Consolidated Mines—Manager CCE, Kleinzee, 14 June 1939; Union of South Africa. Department of Defence, Licence for Aerodrome, 10 June 1939.

81 *GM. NMK 7.* Victor Wilson—Secretary CCE, 13 March 1940; De Beers – Manager Kleinzee, 1 June 1940.

asked their Manager at Kleinzee to carry on with the maintenance work on the aerodrome which he had done in the past.⁸²

A Defence Force aeroplane landed on the Kleinzee aerodrome on 27 July 1942 and two lieutenants inspected the runways. They regarded the aerodrome as not a good one but useful as an emergency landing field. Many questions were asked about the facilities at Kleinzee, such as water supplies, stores of petrol, food supplies, roads, etc., apparently with the idea of obtaining data in case a camp for Air Force personnel would be started at the aerodrome. They also speculated that if a camp was not started they might, if they decided to use the aerodrome, dump fuel there and leave a couple of men as a guard. At that stage they also learned in Kleinzee that there was a movement on foot to black out the coastal villages. Two months later more Air Force officers visited Kleinzee and a better and more likely landing spot for aeroplanes which lay on the farm Sandkop, east of Kleinzee, was inspected.⁸³

In the late 1950s Joe Jowell was already heavily involved in the provision of road transport in Namaqualand and so, when in time it became apparent to him that there was a growing demand for transportation by air, it was a logical extension of his activities to provide an air transport service for the region. Namakwaland Lugdiens commenced operations in November 1960. This Company had grown sufficiently so that by 1978 the return flights were scheduled twice daily. The operational network linked up all the important towns and mining centres (Kleinzee included) in Namaqualand and the neighbouring regions involving more than a dozen stopovers which were served daily.⁸⁴ Now it was not only the transportation of diamonds by air which was important, but more and more passengers wanted to fly, while Kleinzee also started to transport high school children to their schools.

Not to be outdone by Jowell there was in the meantime great excitement in June 1968 when Kleinzee acquired its first aeroplane, a single engine Beaver, a hangar in which to park it and a resident pilot. Until the novelty wore off half the population, especially the children, rushed out every time the plane was heard taking off or landing. The airfield was situated just west of the present retail store and was thus easily accessible. The hangar stood where the hostels were later on built. The road that leads out of town was the runway. Eighteen months later, in December 1969, Father Christmas, after having flown in the Beaver, delivered a bigger and better aeroplane, a twin engine Beechcraft Baron.⁸⁵

82 *Ibid.* De Beers Consolidated Mines—Manager Kleinzee, 18 June 1941; De Beers Consolidated Mines—Director, Civil Aviation, 18 June 1941; De Beers Consolidated Mines—Manager Kleinzee, 26 June 1941; Major TL Lindup—Secretaries CCE, 25 June 1941; De Beers Consolidated Mines—Director of Civil Aviation, 26 June 1941; Major TL Lindup—Secretaries CCE, 2 July 1941.

83 *GM. NMK 4*. Victor Wilson—General Manager, De Beers Consolidated Mines, 2 August and 8 October 1942.

84 Ross, pp. 7.4-7.6.

85 *NM Chronicle*, May 1996.

As the first landing strip at Kleinzee was often closed in by the coastal mist a new airfield was in 1973 built at Sandkop, an adjacent farm further inland out of the mist belt. Kleinzee now had a registered airfield with a surfaced runway, which was operated by De Beers and had a published let down. Since July 1975 it catered for the daily services by National Airlines as well as for chartered and private aircraft. There was another strip at Koingnaas, 65 kilometres south of Kleinzee, which was no longer licensed, but which could be used in an emergency.⁸⁶

In February 1977, Namaqualand Mines obtained a lovely Beechcraft King Air A90. It was able to carry eight passengers and had a cruising speed of 400 kilometres per hour. During 1978 this plane carried 1 361 passengers on 428 flights over almost 195 000 kilometres.⁸⁷

In the early eighties Wing Airways, in conjunction with Namakwaland Lugdiens, had regular flights from Kleinzee to Johannesburg via Aggeneys in only three and a quarter hours.⁸⁸

A nine passenger Piper Chieftain was taken into service by Namakwaland Lugdiens in 1980 to assist in coping with the increased demand for seats. Flights from Upington to Kleinzee were increased from three to five a week. In November 1985 there were daily flights from the former DF Malan Airport at Cape Town to Springbok, Aggeneys, Alexander Bay and Kleinzee. Three months later (1 February 1986) a joint venture between Namakwaland Lugdiens and National Airlines was announced, namely National Airlines. They kept their flights from Cape Town to Kleinzee, Springbok and Alexander Bay unaltered, but dropped the flights from Lanseria to Namaqualand.⁴⁹

This Namakwaland Lugdiens/National Airlines, the brainchild of Joe Jowell, the man who created a road and air transportation facility in and for Namaqualand, continues to serve the region and the people he loved, and for whom he lived.

In 1976, NM obtained its first helicopter, an old 5-seater Bell helicopter, commonly known amongst the employees as the “Blue Dragonfly”, which was mainly used on security missions. Thirteen years later, in 1989, NM purchased a new 6-seater helicopter, commonly known as “Twin Squirrel” (aeronautical name: Aerospatiale Ecurcuil AS355F). This helicopter was used mainly for security purposes and management trips but also ferried spares and sick crew members from De Beers’ ships offshore. It was also equipped with floats for landing on water and a hoist which, among other things, could be used for sea rescue work.⁹⁰

86 Ross, p. 7.12.

87 *Cape Coast Chronicle*, May 1977.

88 *NMD News*, 7 August 1981.

89 Ross, pp. 7.6-7.7.

90 *NM Chronicle*, 3 March 1989 and 14 April 1989.

Another highlight for aviation in Kleinzee was in 1992 when NM's pilot, John Coleshill, brought home its new Cessna Citation Jet (commonly known as the Citation V) all the way from the USA. With this new aircraft Kleinzee was only 50 minutes from Cape Town and two hours from Johannesburg. It was a great leap for NM considering that their first aircraft was a single piston engine four passenger machine and in 1992 they progressed to a twin engine jet.⁹¹ The employees could rightly pose the question: what will be next – a Boeing?

4. SEA TRANSPORT

If you think about the condition of the early roads in and around Kleinzee it is not strange that the Hans Merensky Association (HMA) and the Cape Coast Exploration Limited (CCE) immediately looked at the possibility of sea transportation to keep their mines going. As early as 25 January 1928 they started a shipment for the HMA via Port Nolloth.⁹²

About nine years earlier (1919) Andrew Ovenstone built the first fishing factory at the southern end of the bay at Port Nolloth and this factory was joined by others. Up to 1926 the Port serviced the copper mines by transporting copper ore. From 1926 diamond mining has grown to the benefit of Port Nolloth.

Diamond mines (Kleinzee, the Alluvial State Digging at Alexander Bay and Consolidated Diamond Mining (CDM) at Oranjemund) made transportation demands different to those made by the copper mines. There were no heavy and bulky exports like copper ore, but plant, equipment and supplies all had to be imported and the workers were now not far away at O'kiep (O'kiep Copper Company) but were right on the coast, on both sides of Port Nolloth (because the deposits at Kleinzee to the south had been amongst the first to be discovered).

Water/sea transportation was always considered and looked upon by Namaqualand Mines as a possibility but it never was a solution to the mine's transportation problems. The reason for this was that they did not have a natural harbour along the Namaqualand coast. Port Nolloth is no great natural harbour (South Africa has only one such: Saldanha Bay), but is the best on the Namaqualand coast, and has served its hinterland well.

The physical nature of the coastline limited the number of sites suitable for export harbours. The upper anchorages at both Hondeklip Bay and Port Nolloth were only suitable for small vessels with the result that the majority of ships had to anchor a kilometre or two offshore in the outer anchorages, and their cargoes had to

91 *Ibid.*, July 1992.

92 *HMA* 5. Manager Kleinzee–Secretary CDM, 25 January 1928.

be ferried across the bars in lighters. This double handling not only increased costs, it also increased the time taken for loading or unloading.⁹³

Although vessels continued to arrive at Port Nolloth towards 1950, road transport was fast increasing. A year later, in 1951, the Ernest Oppenheimer bridge was built across the Orange River to connect the Oranjemund diamond mine (CDM) to Port Nolloth and more directly to the rest of South Africa. Ten years later the O'kiep-Steinkopf road was reconstructed and permanently surfaced; in the late seventies this was extended to Port Nolloth and in 1992 to Alexander Bay. Port Nolloth now had good connections to the main road transportation arteries of Southern Africa.⁹⁴

This, naturally, was of great significance to Kleinzee and Namaqualand Mines as well because the mines had a better linkage from Port Nolloth to Oranjemund via Alexander Bay and via Steinkopf to Springbok and the rest of South Africa, although they still had to travel about 35 kilometres of gravel road to Port Nolloth.

Today Port Nolloth has only one fish factory left and the crayfish quota is barely enough to keep that one factory and the many trawlers operating going for a short season. They are exported by road. By 1998 the "Oranjemund" was the only ship operating a regular service to the port: she ran bulk diesel in as required, twice or three times a month. Prior to 1986 a general cargo service was also offered, but road transport has taken over this field.⁹⁵

Warehouse foreman (1980-1985) Phil (Flip) Meyer said that the goods came to Namaqualand Mines either by boat or by train up to a certain point, where Jowell's Transport had to take over. In his time many goods were transported to Port Nolloth by boat and from there it was taken by road to Kleinzee. One of the materials which they used on a regular basis at NM was ferrosilicon which was very heavy and which was necessary for mining operations. It was important for the dividing process. A small drum weighed 100 kilogram and it was cheaper for the Company to transport it by boat.⁹⁶

Retail shop manager (1966-1983) at Kleinzee, Piet van der Walt, added to this by saying that some of Namaqualand Mines' provisions came from Cape Town to Port Nolloth by ship. Sometimes they were forced to throw some of their supplies like sugar and cement overboard, because the ship lay outside Port Nolloth for eight days. There were rock ledges and when the ship lay too deep in the sea she was not able to come into the quay. In their desperation the crew threw some of their supplies into the sea to enable them to drift nearer surface. When they could come over the rock ledges they threw out their anchor and were able to off-load the ship.

93 Ross, pp. 3.26 and 3.34-3.35.

94 *Ibid.*, pp. 3.28-3.30.

95 *Ibid.*, pp. 3.30-3.31.

96 *NM 53/1*. Interview with Phil Meyer, Gordons Bay, 20 February 1998.

At one stage CDM and Namaqualand Mines, while under the direct control of De Beers in Kimberley, bought the port facilities from the South African Railways and Harbours. Oranjemund's supplies were loaded and taken across the Oppenheimer Bridge to CDM, while the rest was taken to Kleinzee and Koingnaas.⁹⁷

Though over the years some of Namaqualand Mines' provisions (especially the heavier goods) came across the sea from Cape Town to Port Nolloth and from there to Kleinzee, they to a greater extent relied on road transport and particularly on Jowells Transport to keep the mines going. If they had a natural harbour near to Kleinzee or Koingnaas, or for example at Port Nolloth or Hondeklip Bay, it would have been an economic proposition to rely mainly on marine transport in bringing all their provisions to Namaqualand Mines. It would have been wonderful, especially in the early years of Namaqualand's terrible roads, if they had the opportunity of simply turning to marine transport instead of trying to master the bad roads around Kleinzee.

5. FINAL REMARK

It is perplexing that Kleinzee, 84 years after the first discovery of diamonds in this semidesert area, still experiences insufficient transport. The road to Kleinzee leads one, as in earlier years, from the main route between Cape Town and Windhoek, from Springbok via "Spektakel" Pass, on a gravel road which can hardly be described as being of good quality. Heavy vehicles which continually transport goods along this road, inevitably contribute largely to the bad condition of the road. The gravel road today takes you exclusively to a mining area, hence the authorities' continued refusal to accept greater responsibility for the maintenance or improvement thereof. The alternative gravel road to Kleinzee from Port Nolloth is also subjected to the use of mine and other vehicles and is similarly not of the best quality. In previous times it was understood that these two roads would never be tarred on account of high costs and a lack of government aid. At present these predictions prove to be true, although wire and pliers no longer are required as standard equipment for a motorist.

The quality of air transport and the airports of Kleinzee and Alexander Bay has naturally improved, but the airports are side routes and require large inputs from the mining authorities in order to be maintained. The harbour of Port Nolloth is equally inadequate, especially for the transport of heavy goods and this forces Namaqualand Mines to still largely make use of road transport to Cape Town and other large centres.

97 *NM 34/1*. Interview with Piet van der Walt, Yzerfontein, 14 January 1998.