

The Importance of Being Earnest – the Relation between Hendrik Witbooi and the Gamsberg

Sanne de Jong

Keywords: Hendrik Witbooi, Gamsberg, colonialism, African Millimeter Telescope (AMT).

Abstract

Hendrik Witbooi (c. 1830–1905) was captain of the Witbooi people living in southern Namibia. For a long time, Witbooi defied the German occupation by fighting against the German colonial troops, until he died of wounds sustained in battle. His leadership in resisting the colonist armies make many consider him as a national hero in Namibia today. The African Millimeter Telescope (AMT) project aims to bring the first sub-mm radio telescope (an essential link to the network of telescopes known as the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT)) to the African continent, specifically the Gamsberg mountain in Namibia. This recommendation will explore Hendrik Witbooi's life and his geographical locations in relation to the Gamsberg mountain.

Introduction¹

‘I have heard that the British and the German Governments held a large meeting to decide who should make Protection treaties with the chiefs of which country in Africa; and that you the British let the Germans have this land. But you stipulated at the meeting that no chief shall be forced. If a leader is

¹ This research is mostly based on German and British colonial military sources, missionary sources from German missionaries and European newspaper articles. The sources are biased and therefore supplementary information is needed. More on this in the conclusion.

willing to, and does not understand why he should need Protection, he cannot be coerced. That was the agreement reached at your meeting, which was endorsed by all those present'²

Abovementioned was written by Hendrik Witbooi, nowadays, seen by some as one of the African leaders who resisted German colonization in what is now Namibia, in November 1892 to the British Magistrate in Walvis Bay, as a complaint about the German colonization of the area.³ By this year, the Germans were already some years active in the region. The German colony, 'Deutsch-Südwestafrika', had been established in 1884. Hendrik Witbooi, together with his people and other groups in the region, resisted the presence of the German colonial troops in his region. He did this among others from his established settlement at Hoornkrans, roughly 20 kilometers from the Gamsberg mountain, where he settled in 1887.

The purpose of this research is to search for a possible connection between Hendrik Witbooi and the Gamsberg. The land on top of the Gamsberg is owned by the Max Planck Society. Before this land will be used for the telescope, it is important to first research the history of the area. During conversations about the idea of the Gamsberg as site for the AMT-telescope, some people mentioned the connection between the Gamsberg and Hendrik Witbooi. The land that will be used for the telescope will be in an area where Hendrik Witbooi was active. For example, his settlement, Hoornkrans, was roughly 20 kilometers from the Gamsberg, a distance that was doable with a horse in that day. It is important to keep in mind that the local people may have a connection with the location, or at least the area, due to the relation with Hendrik Witbooi. In the case of the Mauna Kea protests, the interests of the telescope constructors were put above those of the local population.⁴ There was little respect for the fact that they saw the mountain as a spiritually important place. This must of course not become the case in Namibia.

Sources and methods

I conducted this internship by studying secondary sources (modern academic works and literature about the topic) and primary sources (first-hand accounts). I mostly used German colonial reports and letters as primary sources, but also missionary reports. Of course, both

² Hendrik Witbooi, *The Hendrik Witbooi Papers*, Brigitte Lau ed. (Windhoek 1995) 111-112.

³ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the Namibian Scientific Society. I gratefully thank the AMT-team and especially Dr Klein Wolt and Ms Schut at Radboud University. I am also thankful to Mr Matthaei, Dr Elsemi Olwage, Prof. de Rooy and Prof. Akawa and Dr Bernard Moore at UNAM. Furthermore, I would like to thank Mr De Hoog at University of Leiden, and Dr Hannah Dalgleish from Oxford University, Dr Kramer from Radboud University and Dr Goosmann from Utrecht University.

⁴ In 2014 the construction of a Thirty Meter Telescope caused disturbance among the Hawaiian population. According to Native Hawaiian religion and culture, the Mauna Kea was the home of Wakea, the sky god.

these sources are biased. Missionaries, while they not only actively tried to destroy the local population such as the German forces tried to, still contributed to the destabilization of ethnic groups such as the Herero, Nama and the Orlam Afrikaners under Jan Jonker Afrikaner. Jan Jonker Afrikaner was *Kaptein* of the Orlam Afrikaners in present-day Namibia.⁵ He came to power in 1863 and for a long time, he controlled the trade routes in Southwest Africa. Some think that his control of the area delayed the German penetration of the area that would later become their colony. It is relevant to mention that Jan Jonker Afrikaner, an important person in delaying formal colonial influence in Southwest Africa, has a connection with the Gamsberg as well.⁶ Heinrich Vedder mentions that Jan Jonker Afrikaner ‘went into the Gamsberg’ in December 1880.⁷ After Afrikaners’ power was broken, missionaries were still actively involved in weakening the powers of resistance by various groups, such as the Witboois.⁸

An important source providing information about the geographical location of Hendrik Witbooi was J.H. Esterhuyse. Esterhuyse was an archivist in South Africa and Namibia in the 1960s and has written a book about the German colonization in South West Africa. He mentions the Gamsberg several times in his book *South West Africa 1880–1894: The Establishment of German Authority in South West Africa*.⁹ To conduct his research, he used various archival sources from the colonial period. His work is the only secondary source I could find that explicitly mentions the Gamsberg in relation to Hendrik Witbooi. I was not able to trace all the primary sources the author used regarding the Gamsberg and Witbooi, due to travel restrictions and the outdated archive numbers. However, the ones I was able to trace did indeed confirm this connection. Esterhuyse also based some of his work on the *Quellen* from the missionary Heinrich Vedder, in which Vedder has written a history of Namibia from the 15th century until 1890.¹⁰ This missionary is a valuable source, since

⁵ In Khoekhoegowab Gaob, the term used to describe the leader of a community is translated as King. Captain or Chief is a diminutive term, see: Memory Biwa, ‘Toa Tama! Khams Ge’: Remembering the war in Namakhoeland, 1903–1908’, Master Thesis, University of Cape Town (2006) 9, note 4. Because of the more common use of *Kaptein*, also by people like Hendrik Witbooi himself, I have chosen to use the Dutch/Afrikaans name in this recommendation.

⁶ Jan Jonker Afrikaner is commonly known for his more cruel ways of dealing with his enemy, but he was nevertheless important in keeping the German colonial troops at a distance.

⁷ Heinrich Vedder, *South West Africa In Early Times: Being the story of South West Africa up to date of Maharero's death in 1890*, Cyril G. Hall transl. and ed. (London 1966) 463.; N.A. 289, Whindus – U.S.N.A., 14.10.1882.

⁸ Brigitte Lau, ‘‘Pre-Colonial’’ Namibian historiography: what is to be done?’ in Brian Wood (ed.), *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia's history and society*. (London 1988) 90–101, esp. 95. See for critical works on the role of missionaries in Southwest Africa: Heinrich Loth, *Die Christliche Mission in Südwest-Afrika. Zur destruktiven Rolle der Rheinischen Mission beim Prozess der Staatsbildung in SWA* (Berlin 1963).

⁹ J.H. Esterhuyse, *South West Africa 1880-1894: The Establishment of German Authority in South West Africa* (Cape Town 1968).

¹⁰ I used both the original German and the translated English version, for the German version see: Heinrich Vedder, *Das alte Südwestafrika – Südwestafrikas Geschichte bis zum Tode Mahareros 1890: Nach den besten schriftlichen und mündlichen Quellen erzählt* (Berlin 1934).

he tells a lot about the history of the Namaland before the colonization, but he is also a problematic source because of the racist undertone in his works and his support of German colonialization.¹¹ He also was not contemporary to the history he described, he based his work on documents from the Rhenish Missionary Society and oral history reports.

The problem with the German colonial sources is that they are biased. In some cases, they themselves also didn't know where Hendrik Witbooi was settling or hiding. Since the war between the Germans and the Witboois was a guerilla-war, it is likely that Hendrik Witbooi only settled in some places for quite a short time, making the significance of the locations where he was settling/hiding small. Since the war between the Germans and the Witboois was a guerilla style war, there have been several occasions where the Germans were unaware of the location of Hendrik Witbooi. Whenever colonel Leutwein lost touch with the Witbooi in the Naukluft mountains, he would send a messenger to Witbooi to ask if he was willing to make peace. The real reason of this mission, however, was to track his location.¹²

During my research, it could be established that the Gamsberg throughout history has been known by different names. Before 1884, the most seen name on European maps is the name 'Tansberg'.¹³ In 1836-37, the British Captain James Edward Alexander encountered what he called 'Hill or Berg Damara' at the Tans Mountain, the present Gamsberg Mountain.¹⁴ Nonetheless, other names for the Gamsberg were used as well. During the period of German colonization, the name for the Gamsberg, both on maps and in colonial sources, seems to have been 'Gansberg' (Gans means 'flat rock' in Nama).¹⁵ I also found the mountain was named 'Kansberg' and 'Gr. Schanz Berg'. In 1973, two sources gave the meaning of the name *Gamsberg* as 'lion mountain' from the Nama *Xam(s)*, which means 'lion' and the Afrikaanse word for 'mountain', *berg*.¹⁶ Other sources, however, support the explanation of Gamsberg as 'Enclosing Mountain'.¹⁷ On historical maps, the ambiguity about the spelling of the name is evident. Various maps from overlapping years show a wide variation of spellings. It is also possible that the name Gamsberg was used more broadly than just the mountain itself. This would mean that the area surrounding the Gamsberg, and also the region of Hoornkrans, would be named Gamsberg as well. This theory can, however, be dismissed using the colonial sources. J.H. Esterhuysen mentions that Hendrik

¹¹ Brigitte Lau, 'Pre-Colonial' Namibian historiography: what is to be done?' in Brian Wood (ed.), *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia's history and society*. (London 1988) 90-101, esp. 93-94.

¹² *Die Dagboek van Hendrik Witbooi*, 24. Note from editor.

¹³ See for example: 'Missionskarte von Süd-Afrika nach der Karte in Stieler's Hand Atlas' (1857). <https://www.bmarchives.org/items/show/100203739> (consulted on 30-05-2021).

¹⁴ James E. Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery V Into the Interior of Africa* (Cape Town 1967) 135-136. Originally published in the *Africana Collectanea* Vol. 22/33.

¹⁵ Nicole Grünert, *Namibia Fascination of Geology A Travel Handbook* (Göttingen/Windhoek 2017) 135-136.

¹⁶ P.E. Raper, 'Notes on Khoekhoen Place Names' *South African Journal of Science* 75 (1979), 451.

¹⁷ Lucie Alida Moller, 'N TOPONIMIES-LINGUISTIESE ONDERSOEK NA DUITSE PLEKNAME IN SUIDWES-AFRIKA', 499.



'TANS-MOUNTAIN, DAMARALAND.'

Figure 1: A picture of the Gamsberg, named 'Tans-mountain' by the explorer James Alexander in the 1830s. James Edward Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa: Through the hitherto undescribed Countries of the Great Namaquas, Boschmans, and Hill Damaras* (London 1838).

Witbooi had a new settlement in the Gamsberg after the battle at Hoornkrans.¹⁸ For some sources, it might certainly be true that they are talking about Gamsberg (or in some cases: Gansberg) in reference to Hoornkrans. Since Hoornkrans was very close to the Gamsberg, and the Gamsberg is a famous landmark, those names might have been used to describe the same geographical area.

Historical context Namibia and German colonization

Prior to 1880, European nations controlled only ten percent of Africa. Apart from a French controlled area in the north and South Africa, which was conquered by the British in the south, European trading posts and forts dotted the coast of Western Africa. The inlands of the African continent were largely undiscovered by the Europeans. After 1880, this

¹⁸ J.H. Esterhuyse, 202.

changed. A goldrush mentality by European nations led to a determined race for territory. To lay down some rules for this global competition, Jules Ferry of France and Otto von Bismarck of Germany arranged an international conference on Africa in 1884 and 1885. The Berlin Conference established that European claims on African territory had to be based on a strong presence on the occupied area that was recognized by other European states. Germany was at this moment rising as an imperial power. Prior to 1880, Bismarck had seen little value in colonies. Germany already had some ties in southwest Africa since the 1840s, when missionaries from the Rheinische Mission went to the area.¹⁹ In 1883, the German trader Adolf Lüderitz bought a piece of Namibian ground from a Nama kaptein.²⁰ The trading post of Walvis Bay was a British establishment, and Lüderitz alerted Bismarck that the British had interest in the area, because of its rich natural resources. In 1884, the German protectorate of Deutsch-Südwestafrika (German Southwest Africa) was established, in the area which is nowadays known as Namibia.²¹

Historical context: Hendrik Witbooi

The relation between the Witbooi and modern-day Namibia begins with Hendrik Witbooi's grandfather Kido Witbooi. In the mid-1850s, the Witbooi Nama (!Khowesin) under the leadership of Kido Witbooi (or †Alêib), moved from Pella in present-day South Africa to Gibeon (Khaxa-tsùs), where they settled in 1863. In the 1820s, Kido and his following set out to the north from Pella, in modern-day South Africa. For two decades, they circled the south of Namaland, in the Orange river region.²² In this time, contact was made with the Rhenish missionaries in this region, and in the year 1863, the Witboois established themselves in Kachatus, which they renamed 'Gibeon' (figure 2).²³ The Witbooi then numbered 3000 people living in 30 villages, as counted by the missionary Olpp.²⁴ A Peace Agreement for Hoachanas was initiated by missionary Vollmer that was ratified by 13 Nama Chiefs, including Kido Witbooi. The 'Oorlam Peace' was concluded on 19 December 1867.

¹⁹ Jürgen Zimmerer et al., *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika der Kolonialkrieg (1904-1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin 2016) 16-29, esp. 25.

²⁰ In Khoekhoegowab Gaob, the term used to describe the leader of a community is translated as King. Captain or Chief is a diminutive term, see: Memory Biwa, 'Toa Tama! Khams Ge': Remembering the war in Namakhoeland, 1903-1908', Master Thesis, University of Cape Town (2006) 9, note 4.

²¹ McKay, 807.; Jürgen Zimmerer et al., *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika der Kolonialkrieg (1904-1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin 2016) 16-29, esp. 18-19.; Werner Hillebrecht, *The Witbooi* (1992) 17.

²² Brigitte Lau, 19.; 'Hendrik Witbooi: Ikone und Inspiration des antikononialen Widerstands und des unabhängigen Namibia' in L. Förster: *Namibia-Deutschland: eine geteilte Geschichte* (Köln 2004); Bosman, Hendrik, 'A Nama 'Exodus'? A postcolonial reading of the diaries of Hendrik Witbooi: exodus as narrative concerning origin and migration negotiating identity in Africa', *Scriptura* 108 (2012) 329-341, esp. 334.

²³ Brigitte Lau, 19.; The Rhenish Mission Station was founded in Gibeon, with missionary Jacob Knauer as its first missionary until November 1867, followed by Johannes Olpp (1867-1879).

²⁴ Quellen 16, May 1871.

Hendrik Witbooi was born around 1834 in Pella, the former Witbooi settlement. His Nama name was !Nanseb/Gâbemab, his Herero name was Korota (probably a variation from the Dutch/Afrikaans 'korte'). Hendrik was the son of Moses Witbooi (!Gâbeb !A-!lîmab) and the grandson of Kido Witbooi (!A-!lîb !Gâmebab). Due to the influence of European missionaries, he was raised in the Christian faith (he was baptized together with his wife) and throughout his life, he believed that a divine mission guided his actions. He moved with his family to Gibeon (in modern-day Namibia) where his grandfather had decided they should settle and where Hendrik became a church elder. He resigned from this function in 1883, probably to serve his political obligations as heir and ruler.²⁵

In 1884, Hendrik Witbooi became *Kaptein* of the Witbooi people. At that time, political and military conflicts between the Herero and Nama groups were underway. In June 1884, Witbooi made peace with Maharero after an indecisive battle, but in the following year, the Witboois were defeated by Maharero in the battle of Osana. The Witboois were one of the largest groups in Namaland, but they were not the only group with political and military power. Under Hendrik Witbooi, the number of Witbooi doubled when compared with their number in 1875, as counted by Olpp. By this time, the Witbooi had established themselves in a region stretching as far north as Gobabis (northeast of Windhoek). This increase in numbers, however, involved very large-scale changes. In the 1880s, Hendrik Witbooi's following was extended by his leadership of the 'Witkamskap', a movement transcending all tribal allegiances and drawing members from all over Namaland, who all wore a white scarf around their hats as a distinguishing mark.²⁶ Hendrik Witbooi constantly refused to sign a 'Protection Treaty' with the German colonizer. In 1890, governor Göring urged Hendrik Witbooi in a letter to move from Hoornkrans to Gibeon. In his reply, Hendrik Witbooi informed the governor that the Witbooi Nama would maintain their independence.²⁷ Witbooi wrote to Maharero in 1890, stating: 'You will eternally regret that you have given your land and your right to rule into the hands of the whites'.²⁸ In 1892, Hendrik Witbooi concluded peace with Samuel Maharero, the leader of the Herero and son of Maharero.²⁹

In 1884, the German *Kaiserreich* declared the region as 'Deutsch Südwest-Afrika' (German South West Africa), a part of its colonial empire, which it would be until 1915.³⁰ The colonial power was eager to sign treaties with the different people of Namibia, and

²⁵ Brigitte Lau, 'Concerning the Hendrik Witbooi Papers' in Annemarie Heywood ed., *History and Historiography: 4 Essays in reprint* (Windhoek 1995) 17–37, esp. 18.

²⁶ Ibid., 20.

²⁷ *Die Dagboek van Hendrik Witbooi*, no. 25., 29.05.1890, Hendrik Witbooi to Göring.

²⁸ *Die Dagboek van Hendrik Witbooi*, no. 26., 30.05.1890, Hendrik Witbooi to Maharero. Hendrik Witbooi wrote this to Maharero, after he received a letter from Göring on 20.05.1890 that informed him that the Ovaherero were again under German protection.

²⁹ Werner Hillebrecht, *The Witbooi* (1992) 29. The Herero and the Nama were first at war in August of the year 1880, when a war broke out between the Nama and the Ovaherero, after the battle of Gurumanas (!Gurumâ!nâs).

³⁰ Brigitte Lau, 'Concerning the Hendrik Witbooi Papers' in Annemarie Heywood ed., *History and Historiography: 4 Essays in reprint* (Windhoek 1995) 17–37, esp. 18.

would give them a ‘protection status, but Hendrik refused to sign these treaties and tension between the Germans and the Witbooi rose. In 1893, the Witboois were attacked at their stronghold at Hoornkrans, where they had settled in the year 1887.³¹ Witbooi and his warriors were able to escape, but many died in the ambush, including two of Witbooi’s sons. In 1894, the former governor was replaced with Governor Theodor Leutwein, after which the colonization of the country entered a new stage. Little else counted but to subdue Witbooi, because by now the Germans understood that otherwise no protectorate could be maintained. The battles between Witbooi and the German troops continued in the Naukluft mountains.³² On the 15th of September in 1894, Witbooi surrendered to Governor Leutwein in the Naukluft Mountains. With the treaty, Witbooi surrendered a territory of 20.000 km² and jurisdiction over his people and land.³³ He promised to live peacefully and abandon warlike and marauding ways. Between 1894 and 1904, Witbooi lived at Gibeon, where he assisted occasionally the German troops against other ethnic groups. The Witboois were allowed to possess arms and had a limited autonomy. In January 1895, governor Leutwein led a ‘punitive expedition’ against the Khauas and Fransman Nama and later against the Bondelswarts in the south, which led to the military defeat of these groups. In this expeditions, he was assisted by Hendrik Witbooi and his men.³⁴

A shocking event was the battle at Waterberg in August 1904, where on orders of General Lothar von Trotha, many of the Herero people were attacked, killed or forced to flee into the desert. Witbooi was disgusted with the way Von Trotha led a cruel and bloody war against the Herero, and decided to raise arms against the German colonial army again. He joined Samuel Maharero in the war of resistance and led the Nama soldiers in an insurrection against the colonial power. Hendrik Witbooi was killed in action, and died on 29 October 1905, from wounds sustained in battle (near Vaalgras, see figure 2).³⁵ Hendrik Witbooi was succeeded by his son, Samuel Isaak Witbooi, who moved to Rietmont, present-day Leonardville. On 19/20 november 1905, this successor was forced to surrender to the Germans at Berseba. Other Namas soon followed. The resistance of the Nama and the Herero troops was broken. Survivors were forced into concentration camps, where many of them died.

³¹ BAP, RKA 10.01.2128, von Goldammer an Göring, 08.05.1887, S. 68.

³² Hendrik Witbooi had bought ammunition and weapons from the British trader Robert Duncan in December 1888, in exchange for thousands of heads of cattle.

³³ Bühler, Andreas Heinrich, ‘Der Namaaufstand gegen die deutsche Kolonialherrschaft in Namibia von 1904-1913’ 4.

³⁴ It is important to understand that the conflicts and wars between the various ethnic groups and the German colonial government were very complex and that to understand them fully more information is needed. There were various actors in play that played a role in the conflicts. For more information see: The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, Brigitte Lau ed. (Windhoek 1989)., Dag Hendrichsen, *Herrschaft und Alltag im vorkolonialen Zentralnamibia: Das Herero und Damaraland im 19. Jahrhundert* (2011).

³⁵ Brigitte Lau, ‘Concerning the Hendrik Witbooi Papers’ in Annemarie Heywood ed., *History and Historiography: 4 Essays in reprint* (Windhoek 1995) 17-37, esp. 30-37.; Werner Hillebrecht, *The Witbooi* (1992) 47.

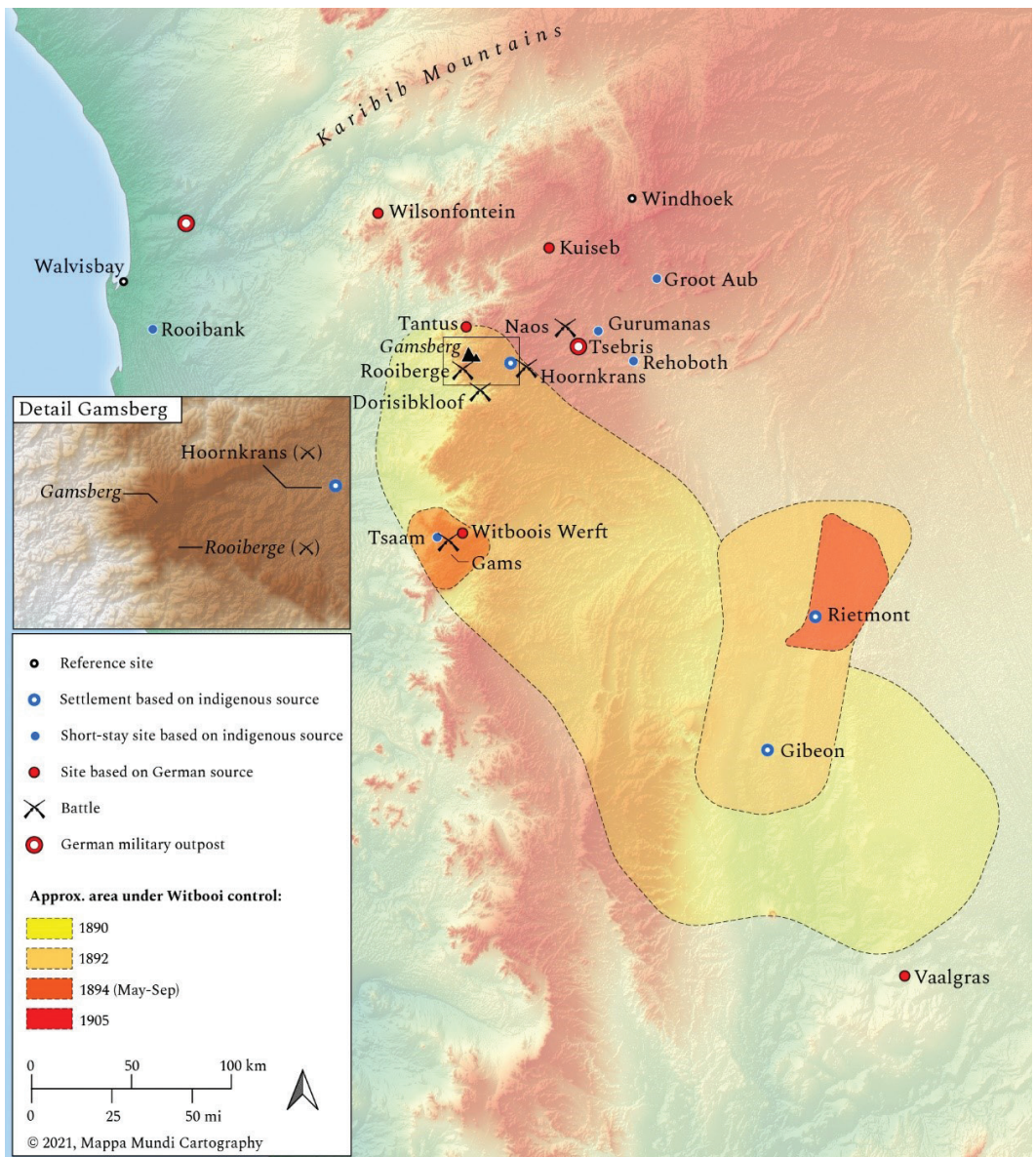


Figure 2: The areas under Witbooi control according to German maps and estimations. The sites portray the settlements or short-stay locations where Hendrik Witbooi was active.³⁶

³⁶ I would like to thank Erik Goosmann for making this map for this research. The locations on the map are based on German colonial maps and descriptions in the diary of Hendrik Witbooi. The locations, certainly those on the German colonial maps, may therefore be located incorrectly. It is important to keep in mind that these locations are in some cases rough estimates of where the actual location may have been.

Was Hendrik Witbooi on the Gamsberg?

The first mention of Hendrik Witbooi in relation to the Gamsberg can be traced to 1882. Jan Jonker Afrikaner was reportedly in conflict with the Herero at this time and left for the Gamsberg, because he ‘could hide himself and his loot in its impenetrable kloofs.’³⁷ A mention of Jan Jonker at the Gamsberg was made by a captain in the German infantry:

‘Dieser [Hendrik Witbooi] und Jan Jonker, der in den unwirtlichen Schluchten des Gansberges hauste, fielen mordend und brennend, sengend und plünderend über Feinde und Bundesgenossen her. Jahrelang sollten Sie ganz Südwestafrika in Aufregung und Unruhe erhalten.’³⁸

He writes in 1882 that the missionary J.G. Krönlein had received instructions to go to Namaland and make peace between the Herero and the Nama, who were in conflict at that time. Krönlein visited his mountain stronghold on the Gamsberg then.³⁹ A British source mentions that the Rooinasie of Hoachanas, together with the Herero and the Basters made a joint attempt in September of the year 1882 to drive the Afrikaners from the Gamsberg.⁴⁰ Another source mentions that Jan Jonker Afrikaner had the habit of coming down from the ‘Gansberg’ to steal cattle from the Basters.⁴¹ In correspondence between the governor Göring and German official Louis Nels, it is mentioned that Nels left for the Gamsberg in January of the year 1886, where Jan Jonker Afrikaner was living at that time with about sixty families.⁴²

In 1889, the German biologist/geologist Ed. Fleck tried to reach the top of the Gamsberg via the southern side to study birds, but the expedition was made impossible because of a

³⁷ Heinrich Vedder, 464.

³⁸ Kurd Schwabe, *Mit Schwert und Pflug in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Vier Kriegs- und Wanderjahre* (Berlin 1904) 56. Schwabe mentions the following: ‘Dieser [Hendrik Witbooi] und Jan Jonker, der in den unwirtlichen Schluchten des Gansberges hauste, fielen mordend und brennend, sengend und plünderend über Feinde und Bundesgenossen her. Jahrelang sollten Sie ganz Südwestafrika in Aufregung und Unruhe erhalten.’

³⁹ Heinrich Vedder, *South West Africa In Early Times: Being the story of South West Africa up to date of Maharo's death in 1890*, Cyril G. Hall transl. and ed. (London 1966) 467. In Krönlein's word the mountain stronghold was ‘a natural fortress, which most up-to-date booter could not have selected and devised better for the protection of himself and his loot.’

⁴⁰ Cape Archives Depot Archives Native Affairs (N.A.) 290. Simpson-U.S.N.A., 11.10.1883.; J.H. Esterhuyse 36.

⁴¹ Heinrich Vedder, 470.

⁴² Archives Depot of South West Africa: *Das Zentral-Bureau* (B.Z.): 1. A1a1: Inbesitznahme des Schutzgebiets, 1882-1896. Nels-Göring, 13.02.1886, 118.; J.H. Esterhuyse 109.; Dr. Heinrich Ernst Göring (1839-1913) was the father of the Nazi War Minister. He was a Deutsche Reichskommissar that was active in German Southwest Africa since 1885.

war between Hendrik Witbooi and Jan Jonker Afrikaner.⁴³ Fleck even mentions that Jan Jonker was shot there by Hendrik Witbooi.⁴⁴ At the end of 1892, Fleck was able to reach the southern side of the mountain. He mentions that he passed the ‘robber’s cave’ from Hendrik Witbooi on the way to the southern side of the mountain.⁴⁵ There is another mention in a German colonial handbook of Jan Afrikaner in the area of Gansberg:

‘Ich wollte in 1889 den [Gans/Gams] Berg umgehen, um von der südliche Seite anzukommen, diese Absicht wurde aber durch die Kriege zwischen dem Hottentottenhäuptling Hendrik Witboy von Gibeon einerseits und durch die verbündeten Häuptlinge Jan Jonker Afrikander, Manasse von !Hoaxanas und Fripp andererseits vereitelt. Damals war ich gezwungen, mein Lager mehrere Nächte hindurch durch Vorsichtsmaßregeln gegen allfällige Angriffe von Seite der verbündeten kriegführenden Hottentottenstämme zu schützen und schließlich wegen völligen Wassermangels aufzugeben.’⁴⁶

Hendrik Witbooi was also in a struggle with the Herero in the second half of the 1880s. He would often steal their cattle and vice versa. One attack from the Herero led to the death of two of his sons, which caused the tension between the two groups to escalate for some time. After they were defeated by the Herero somewhere in the area around Rehoboth, Hendrik Witbooi decided that they should not settle back in Gibeon. Instead, they settled in the Gamsberg.⁴⁷ The claim that Hendrik left for the Gamsberg is supported by German and British colonial sources. In September 1886, correspondence between a German official and the German Auswärtiges Amt (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) claims that Hendrik Witbooi had permanently hidden himself in the Gamsberg, where he received large quantities of arms through Namaland from the south.⁴⁸ A year later, it is reported that the leader of the Herero, Maherero, sent 250 of his men to look for Hendrik Witbooi. When they

⁴³ Ed. Fleck., ‘Das Vogelleben Deutsch-Südwestafrikas und dessen Schauplatz’, mentions the following: ‘Ich wollte in 1889 den [Gans/Gams] Berg umgehen, um von der südliche Seite anzukommen, diese Absicht wurde aber durch die Kriege zwischen dem Hottentottenhäuptling Hendrik Witboy von Gibeon einerseits und durch die verbündeten Häuptlinge Jan Jonker Afrikander, Manasse von !Hoaxanas und Fripp andererseits vereitelt. Damals war ich gezwungen, mein Lager mehrere Nächte hindurch durch Vorsichtsmaßregeln gegen allfällige Angriffe von Seite der verbündeten kriegführenden Hottentottenstämme zu schützen und schließlich wegen völligen Wassermangels aufzugeben.’

⁴⁴ Ed. Fleck., ‘Das Vogelleben Deutsch-Südwestafrikas und dessen Schauplatz’ 301-302.: ‘Waren wir schon in den letzten Nächten von Spionen Jan Jonkers umgeben, so folgte er auch bald selbst, seinen Weg über das Gebirge nehmend und von Hendrik verfolgt nach, der ihn endlich einholte, einschloss, seine Scharen aufrieb und ihn selbst erschoss.’; While Ed. Fleck mentions that Hendrik Witbooi shot Jan Jonker Afrikaner, other sources mention that Jan Jonker Afrikaner was.

⁴⁵ Ed. Fleck., ‘Ende 1892 erst hatte ich Gelegenheit, unserem Bergkoloss von der südlichen Seite her auf den Leib zu rücken, indem ich die Räuberhöhle Hendriks über Gubitsaas her passierte’.

⁴⁶ Ed. Fleck., ‘Das Vogelleben Deutsch-Südwestafrikas und dessen Schauplatz’ 301.

⁴⁷ Quellen 27, Bericht, Diehl, 30.12.1886, 112.

⁴⁸ Z.B. 1, Nels-Ausw. Amt., 6.9.1886., 142.; J.H. Esterhuysen 115.

reached the Gamsberg, they saw his camp fire burning between two mountain ranges. This was, however, a trap, and they were surrounded. The Herero fled and thousands of Herero cattle were driven into Hendrik's 'mountain fastness'.⁴⁹ After the death of his father, Moses Witbooi, Hendrik got into conflict with Jan Jonker Afrikaner. He decided to leave Gibeon, but did not consider Gamsberg a safe place anymore.⁵⁰ He decided to settle in Hoornkrans instead, which is around 30 kilometers from the Gamsberg (figure 2).⁵¹

In 1888, Hendrik Witbooi and the Witbooi were in conflict with the Rooinasie. At Kowas Manasse, the leader of the Rooinasie, received an invitation from Jan Jonker Afrikaner to move to the Gamsberg, where the Afrikaners were settled then. Witbooi got wind of the move of the Rooinasie and attacked the tribe near Rehoboth, while they were on their way.⁵² Jan Jonker Afrikaner was murdered in 1889, hereby ending the polity of the Oorlam Afrikaners. After this, it is possible that Witbooi filled the power vacuum left in the Gamsberg area, since Jonker Afrikaner was not there anymore to control this area.

After the battle at Hoornkrans, we know that eventually battles between the German colonial troops and the Witboois continued in the Naukluft mountains. Nevertheless, between Hoornkrans and the Naukluft, the Witbooi fought against the German troops in the Gamsberg area for some time as well. Several newspapers mentioned that Hendrik went to the Gamsberg after the attack on Hoornkrans.⁵³ At some point, it was said that Hendrik and his men had fled on the Gamsberg, where the governor of the colony, Curt von François, tried to take them down with mountain cannons.⁵⁴ Curt von François seemed convinced for a while that Witbooi was on the Gamsberg, but it is unclear whether this was the case. In German sources, there is no mention again of Hendrik being on the Gamsberg after this, only of him being on the 'Rote Berge' near Hoornkrans, but it is quite difficult to determine which mountain/mountains are meant by this.⁵⁵ It is probable that these were the

⁴⁹ Heinrich Vedder, 492-493.

⁵⁰ Heinrich Vedder, 498.

⁵¹ J.H. Esterhuyse, 127.

⁵² J.H. Esterhuyse, 147.; U.G. 41-'26, p. 39, par. 109.; V.R.S. 9, pp. 22-23, no.9.; V.R.S. pp. 45-46, no. 18.; Z.B. 2029, WIId21bd1, Manesse-Göring, 25.3.1889, p. 135-136.

⁵³ The Times, 11-11-1893: Cape Town, nov. 8. 'About October 5. Captain von François, with his whole available force and with some native allies, left Windhök with the object of capturing Witbooi dead or alive. In an engagement with Witbooi's force several Germans were killed and wounded. Witbooi made a further stand and then fled to a mountain near Hornkrantz. Captain von François shelled the mountain, but Witbooi escaped. Captain von François has abandoned the expedition for the present – Our correspondent.'; *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 25-01-1894. Transl. by me.: 'Major von François has reported that he defeated Hendrik Witbooi and caused his troops many losses, on the first of January at Gamsberg.'

⁵⁴ J.H. Esterhuyse 198.; *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, 11.05.1893.

⁵⁵ *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 24. 15-12-1893, 564: 'Auf die Runde, daß Witbooi auf dem Rothen Berge unweit von Hornkrantz Stellung bezogen habe, war die verstärkte Schußtruppe mit zwei Beschüßen am 24. September von Windhoek aufgebrochen und nach fünftägigem Marsche in Hornkrantz eingetroffen. Am 2. Oktober wurde die Stellung der Witboois angegriffen. Dieselben wichen einem offenen Kampfe aus und flüchteten von Fels zu Fels nach der etwa 400 Meter tiefer liegenden Thalhohle und suchten schließlich in schwer zugänglichen Schluchten Schuß.'

mountains directly south of the Gamsberg, since these are nowadays known as the ‘hintere Rote Berge’ (directly south of the Gamsberg) and the ‘vordere Rote Berge’ (roughly south of Hoornkrans, see figure 2). It therefore cannot be said with certainty if Hendrik Witbooi was *on* the Gamsberg himself, since the sources mentioning this are vague and uncertain themselves. What can be concluded is that Hendrik Witbooi was *at* Gamsberg, meaning around and nearby the mountain, and he might have used the gorges of the mountain itself to hide himself and his men from the German troops.

Recommendation

This research on the relation between Hendrik Witbooi and the Gamsberg has found that there is certainly a relationship between Hendrik Witbooi and the Gamsberg area. While a connection between Hendrik Witbooi and the Gamsberg can be made, two things remain uncertain. It cannot be said for sure if Hendrik Witbooi himself was physically on top of the mountain itself, or if he was just merely in its gorges and around the mountain. Secondly, Hendrik Witbooi seemed to be the most active on the Gamsberg when he was in battle with Jan Jonker Afrikaner and the Herero in the 1880s. He may have used the mountain to hide himself from German troops in the 1890’s and fight against them after the battle at Hoornkrans, but not so extensively as before, since this battle eventually moved to the Naukluft mountains south of the Gamsberg. A relation between the Gamsberg and the Witbooi in the time of the struggle against the Germans in 1904 and 1905 cannot be made. Hendrik Witbooi and the Witbooi people had by this time settled in Rietmont and Gibeon. So, in short: yes, Hendrik Witbooi can be connected to the Gamsberg mountain, he was in the area and roamed the area around and near the Gamsberg in his battles against Jan Jonker, the Herero and the German colonial army. But, it cannot be established that he himself was on the mountain for certain.

Since I was unable to study all the sources, I wanted to, due to travel-restrictions, I believe there are still valuable sources that possibly contain useful information on this matter. These sources, not only in Namibia, but also in South Africa and probably Germany, Switzerland and Great Britain as well, may contain information that is valuable for the history of the area. There might also be more maps that contain more detailed information regarding land ownership by the Germans and the usage of land by the Witbooi. Other than Jan Jonker Afrikaner’s presence on/near the Gamsberg, there were probably other groups that roamed the area as well, years before the Afrikaners and Witboois were in the area such as the Damara. But also, the history of the area in the years after, when the Witbooi settled in Gibeon again and the land was most likely sold to farmers, is relevant for the

project.⁵⁶ To my knowledge, little research has been done on the occupation of this area on a micro-level. It might be beneficial for the project - and for Namibia as well – that more research on a more local scale is done. It might be beneficial to look at long-term archeological projects in the area, but also short-term projects such as historical research on Jan Jonker Afrikaners presence in the area.⁵⁷ What is the role of Jan Jonker Afrikaner and the Afrikaners in the area? But also, what is the role of other groups such as the Damara and the Herero in this research? It may be beneficial to establish if people feel that the Gamsberg is an important location for them or are other sites in the area important for them, as Hoornkrans is for example. More research needs to be done on the relevance of the Gamsberg for the Witbooi people, Nama and Namibians themselves in present-day Namibia.⁵⁸

This research is sensitive, given the negotiations between Namibia and Germany at the moment. Since the land on top of the Gamsberg is still in foreign hands, Hendrik Witbooi, or any other figure that had a close relation with the Gamsberg and is of historical or mythical importance for the Namibians today, may be used to negotiate a ‘significant’ status of the Gamsberg. Since the Gamsberg is connectable to the Nama, victims of the genocide, this strengthens the sensitivity of the subject. I suggest more research must be done on the area and on the connection between the Gamsberg and important figures, but also on other ethnic groups that roamed the area in its history, to ensure that the project is aware of, and shows respect for the historical significance of the local area.

⁵⁶ Cited from Wilfrid Haacke, ‘The hunt for the Damara IHaibab in 1903: Contemporary oral testimony’ Journal of Namibian Studies 8 (2010) 7-25, esp. 23.: ‘According to unconfirmed information IHaibab’s father, Abraham IGuruseb, had been chief (*gao-aob*) in the vicinity of the Gamsberg further south, but some unknown reason had had to leave that area for the area IÂgommes (Okombahe) where his son later established himself with a following of marauders.’

⁵⁷ Some archeological research has been done in the area, also on the rock art that can be found in the region. See for example: Ernst-Rudolf Scherz, *Felsbilder in Südwest Afrika, Teil III (Vienna/Cologne 1986)*.; John Kinahan, *Pastoral Nomads of the Central Namib Desert: the people history forgotten (Windhoek 1991)*.; Beatrice Sandelowsky, *Prehistory of the Central Namib Desert (Windhoek 2013)* and Beatrice Sandelowsky, *Archaeologically Yours – a personal journey into the prehistory of Southern Africa, in particular Namibia (Windhoek 2004)*.; M. Shackley, ‘Palaeolithic archeology of the Central Namibia Desert’, *Cimbebasia Memoire* 6 (1984).

⁵⁸ ‘In 1988 a commemoration was held at farm Hornkrantz near the Gamsberg pass. In the case of Hornkrantz, this choice of festival site was linked to an explicit, though unsuccessful effort to re-appropriate the farm, which lies some 200 km northwest of Gibeon.’, cited from Reinhart Kössler, ‘Constructing and Claiming Identities and Spaces: Commemorations in Southern and Central Namibia’ in R. Kössler, *Namibia and Germany: Negotiating the Past (Windhoek 2015)* 205.

About the Author

Sanne de Jong (1998) is a Master student in Human Geography at the Radboud University in Nijmegen and has a Master of Arts in history, where she graduated on the relation between volcanic eruptions, climate change, and social and political unrest in Mediterranean Europe. For her master's in history, Sanne completed an internship, doing historical research for the AMT project on the relationship between Hendrik Witbooi and the Gamsberg.

Address

Email address: j.m.dejong@student.ru.nl

