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THE RED HILL COMMUNITY NEAR SIMONSTOWN

The Red Hill Community near Simonstown is a group of some 500 Coloured people, who live off the Main Road on top of Red Hill, some five miles by road from the centre of Simonstown. It has been in existence for over one hundred years.

The men in the community are mainly dock-labourers, while the women are housewives and domestic servants. A bus service runs from Simonstown to the top of Red Hill, but has only recently been introduced. Before that, people had to climb up and down the mountain - very few of them own cars.

The community lives under fairly hard conditions - which only serve to accentuate their reasons for wishing to remain in the area. The community is served by a poor gravel road, it is without water, electricity or sanitation. Women and children have to fetch firewood and draw water from the three taps serving the community.

The land is owned by the Municipality, the Methodist Church, and certain individual families who have inherited the land which was held by their forefathers from the time when the whole area was a farm. Only a little of the land is now under cultivation, however.

Most provisions have to be bought in Simonstown - the nearest shopping centre - but a Kupugani depot operates once a week, and there is a regular greengrocer van which visits the community.

Despite the hardships of the life on Red Hill, the majority of the houses are clean, neat and well-furnished. Housing ranges from stone and brick cottages to "pondoks", the latter usually inhabited by newcomers who have been unable to find accommodation in the town.

In the recent survey, nearly every member of the community professed some religion. The largest denominations are Anglican and Methodist, while there is a small but compact group of New Apostolic. There are Anglican and Methodist Churches on the Hill, and the New Apostolics are in the process of completing a new Church, at considerable expense.

All three Churches have organised activities, the best being the Methodist Church which has set about providing services desperately needed by the community. The Methodists run Guilds, a Women's Association, and an interdenominational Recreation Club. These organisations are valuable in providing useful social outlets for the people who attend them, and to whom they minister.

The area is served by three primary schools - one, run by the Methodists, in the heart of the community, and two within reasonable walking distance, and one high school. A noteworthy feature of the community is the eagerness on the part of most parents for their children to gain a good education.

Another feature of the community is the number of kin relationships between its members. In the words of more than one of the inhabitants: "We're all related up here". The complexity of kin ties in the community serves to bind it in a very close-knit fashion, which results in a feeling of solidarity of the group towards the outside world.

Despite the many hardships, the vast majority of the inhabitants wish to remain where they are, and have no wish to be moved. The reasons for this are various. For instance, the almost complete lack of crime in the community is pointed to with pride, and inhabitants are wont to point out that it is one of the few Coloured communities where one can walk about at night in absolute safety.

The community is also valued for its position - within reach of the place of employment, and yet out of it - resulting in a quiet area (which some of the younger people regard as too quiet!) away from the rush of city life. Many of the older people look forward to retiring there in peace and quiet. It is also pointed out that the community is served by the two necessities of life for the majority - Churches and schools.

The community is not without problems: drinking for example is prevalent in the lower-status homes, and is largely attributable to boredom owing to a lack of recreational facilities. However, the problem is being tackled - notably by the Methodists - and the emergence of the Red Hill Recreation Club is an encouraging step. The introduction of a bus service, too, now makes it far easier for members of the community to make use of the amenities in Simonstown itself.

From a sociological point of view, there is no reason why the community should be moved. They are adequately served by Churches and schools, and are within fairly easy reach of their place of employment, following the introduction of a bus service. In fact there would not appear to be any reason why the area could not be developed into a satisfactory residential area by the introduction of water (the Simonstown waterworks is adjacent to the community), electricity and sanitation.

In human terms, the people should not be moved for a number of reasons. They have many of them lived on the Hill all their lives, and in fact many of the families have been on the Hill for generations. Some of them own land, they have their own Churches and schools. They are secure and happy in their close-knit community, and take pride in its peacefulness and the absence of crime. And further, the community is bound together by strong ties of kinship and marriage.

In short, they are a law-abiding, hard-working community with a strong tradition of attachment to their territory built up over generations. They are not by any means a rich community, and many of them would be extremely hard-pressed if they were moved further away from their employment - especially as the women-folk would not be as easily able to supplement family incomes with part-time domestic employment, not to mention the likely increase in expenditure caused by fares.

The Red Hill community causes no trouble and serves the larger community well. They have made the best out of unfavourable conditions, and ask only to be left in peace.

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