

WALKING TOUR

OBSERVATORY
CAPE TOWN

This walking tour through Observatory, better known as Obs, welcomes local residents and visitors alike, to explore the rich and diverse history of the eclectic neighbourhood.

Observatory, recognised as a student neighbourhood and heritage area, is dually bustling with new life whilst its history remains evident in the built fabric. The walk aims to highlight the history of Observatory through an exploration of key spaces and sites from both the past and present.

This walk is split into three different categories, namely **'Contextualising Observatory's First Settlers', 'The Arrival of Victorian Architecture'** and **'New Developments in Observatory'**.

Following the map, one will be aware of how these different categories overlap and how the built fabric of Observatory has drastically changed.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION:

This walking tour does not have any given starting point or order in which to follow. The various sites and buildings can be visited as the interested individual pleases.



The Observatory Improvement District (**OBSID**) was created in July 2009, under the consent of the Cape Town City council, after Observatory was declared a Special Rating Area (SRA) – also referred to as City Improvement Districts (CID's).

OBSID offers safety services, urban management and social development. Their projects focus on arts, culture and heritage.



UCT KNOWLEDGE CO-OP

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The UCT Knowledge Co-op facilitated this collaboration between OBSID and UCT.
See <http://www.knowledgeco-op.uct.ac.za>



CONTEXTUALISING OBSERVATORY'S
FIRST SETTLERS



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1. Rheezicht Windmill

Milton Mews, a townhouse complex, stands on the site where the Rheezicht Windmill once stood. The windmill existed in the area in the 19th century, built on the Rheezicht farm alongside thatched outbuildings in the upper part of Observatory. The farm dates back to 1768.

2. The Varsche Drift House

This farmhouse dates back to 1783 and stood on a 4 hectare property owned by Frederik Wilhelm Altemann, facing the Liesbeeck River. The Varsche Drift House was built on a raised section of the property so that it was safe from the prominent flooding experienced near the river. The house was demolished in the 1960s. The property is now owned by SA Railways, and workers' cottages were built on the foundations of the Varsche Drift House.

3. Coornhooft's Barn

A section of Settlers Way lies on the site where the Coornhooft's Barn once stood where the name 'Coornhooft' (hope of corn), comes from the 1667 large Voice of the Cape Barn, which was built on the property to store grain. The farm stretches from what is known as Durban road today, up to Wagon road.

THE ARRIVAL OF VICTORIAN ARCHITECTURE



NEW DEVELOPMENTS



1. Madison Place

This large nine storey development located on Trill Road, offers luxury apartments for young professionals. This location is ideal for medical students and doctors as it is close to Groote Schuur Hospital and the University of Cape Town's Faculty of Health Sciences.

2. The Paragon

The Paragon is located on Main road, an apartment block ideal for students or young professionals. Affordable accommodation is always in demand in Cape Town and this location is increasingly popular. This development boasts hospitals and shops.

3. The Eden

Just down the road from The Madison, this large development boasts the same amenities. An apartment block in an ideal location for students and doctors working at Groote Schuur hospital. Just off the main road, located on Trill road.

4. Campus Key

Located on Daene Street, this block of private student accommodation plays an important role for students in Cape Town. There is an ever-growing need for safe student accommodation, especially for foreign students. Campus Key offers a wide range of extra amenities, such as study rooms, socialising areas, as well as on-site therapists and advisors. This particular Campus Key has 222 beds.

5. The Winchester

Located on Main Road, the Winchester is a block of luxury apartments for the young professional. It is ideal located as it is close to the highways and to the city center.

1. Valkenberg

The Valkenberg estate was initially an agricultural farm, founded in 1720. During this time, a Victorian farm house was erected. In 1881 the farm house, with some further extensions, was transformed into a mental hospital to assist patients transferred from Robben Island. Today, this government-funded care facility is the main teaching hospital for the University of Cape Town's Department of Psychiatry.

2. The River Club

The River Club, built in 1939, is considered a landmark today. It serves not only as a conference centre and golf hub, but also as an urban park, flood plain and a significant heritage and historical resource. Many points of content have been reached about the proposals made to develop The River Club, that ignore the importance of preserving it as a cultural and recreational place for all.

3. The Royal Observatory

Erected in 1820, the Royal Observatory is located between the Liesbeeck and Black River. It was founded by British astronomer, Reverend Fearon Fallows. The building is comprised of a dome containing a telescope as well as a laboratory building, both portray Victorian architectural elements. The Royal Observatory is now the South African Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) Headquarters.

4. St Michael and All Angels Parish Church

This is the local Parish Church for Anglicans living in Herbert Baker in 1905. St Michael's is a parish in the Diocese of Cape Town, in the Anglican church of Southern Africa.

5. Groote Schuur Hospital

Inside this hospital lies the Heart Transplant museum, where Christiaan Barnard performed the first ever human heart transplant, in 1967. Groote Schuur is situated on the slopes of Devil's Peak. It is a large government funded teaching hospital. It was founded in 1938. The University of Cape Town uses Groote Schuur as the primary academic hospital for its medical school.

CONTEXTUALISING OBSERVATORY'S FIRST SETTLERS

The arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck and his entourage in 1652, marked the beginning of Dutch Colonialism and ultimately the end of the Khoi people. At this time there was no built environment. The Khoi people used the Liesbeek and Black River banks as a source of sustenance and left few traces of their existence.

This category aims to contextualise the first settlers who arrived in Observatory, through an exploration of the sites and buildings they fabricated. Today, very few of these buildings still exist and in some cases these sites are now occupied by other built infrastructure.

- 1 **Milton Mews,**
Milton Road, Observatory
- 2 **Varche Drift**
- 3 **Settlers Way,**
N2

THE ARRIVAL OF VICTORIAN ARCHITECTURE

South Africa is rich and diverse in both culture and built environment. With the arrival of white immigrants in 1652, local architecture became influenced by various architectural styles emerging in Europe, Asia and America during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Nevertheless, South Africa produced its own vernacular architectural style inspired by these other cultures. Subsequently, this has resulted in cross-cultural pollination that is apparent in the architecture of today.

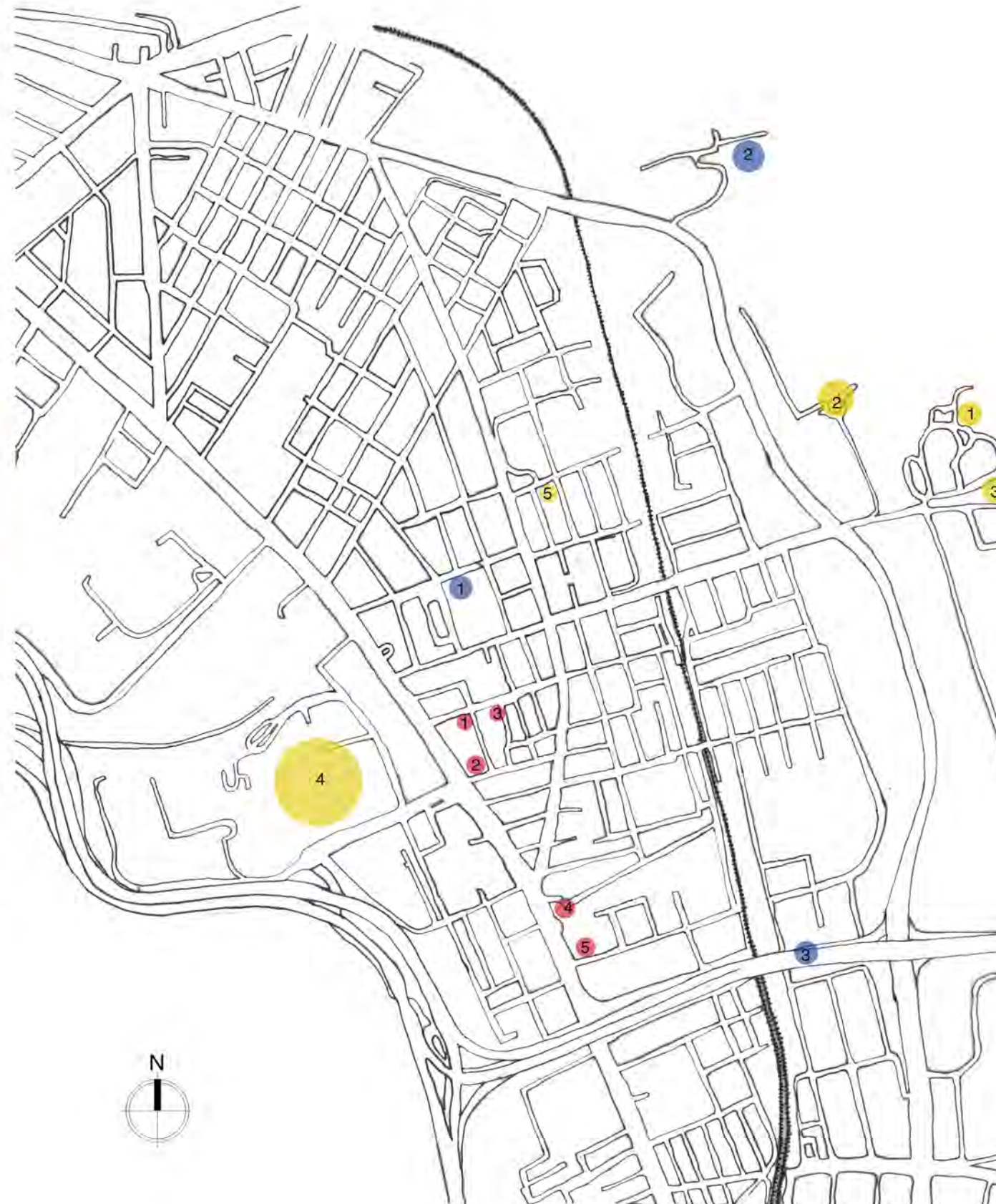
The frills of Victorian colonial structures, for example, have been reinterpreted by local designers and featured in their traditional decorative pieces. Although the Victorian period was characterized by exuberant and richly textured architecture, this character heavily relied on the incorporation of applied decoration. Victorian architecture is more commonly known for its eclecticism, which is apparent throughout Observatory and other areas of Cape Town.

- 1 **Valkenberg,**
Observatory Rd, Observatory,
- 2 **The Riverclub,**
Liesbeek Avenue, Observatory
- 3 **The Royal Observatory,**
1 Observatory Rd, Observatory
- 4 **Groote Schuur Hospital,**
Main Road, Observatory
- 5 **St Michael and All Angels Parish Church,**
St Michaels Rd, Observatory

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OBSERVATORY CAPE TOWN



NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN OBSERVATORY

The term 'developments' is a complex and often misused term. One generally sees something develop as it grows and becomes more advanced in its purpose, however developers are often not always concerned with the best interests of the community and environment. Observatory has been increasingly developed over time. Property is cheap for the area, making it a prime spot for developers. As a result of development, property prices increase, leaving locals unable to afford their homes. It also brings a lot of people to the area, resulting in overcrowding, which in turn increases crime, traffic and noise pollution.

This category of buildings showcases some of the few new developments in Observatory, amongst many that are underway.

- 1 **The Madison,**
6 Trill Road, Observatory
- 2 **The Paragon,**
423 Main Road, Observatory
- 3 **The Eden,**
12 Trill Road, Observatory
- 4 **CampusKey,**
6A Dane street , Observatory
- 5 **The Winchester,**
228 Main Road, Observatory

THE LIESBEEK RIVER

The Liesbeek River, formerly known as the Amstel, is 9km long and can be traced to the origins of South Africa's first settlement. The river was a source of fresh water and used for agricultural purposes. The network of rivers in Observatory, prior to Freeburgher settlement created a large marshland in which wild animals grazed. The animals were later hunted by these settlers and by the 18th century no game remained.

The Liesbeek originates on the eastern slope of Table Mountain all the way into Observatory, meeting the Black River at what now known as the 'Two Rivers Urban Park', a nature reserve area.

THE BLACK RIVER

The Black River, formerly known as Kromboom's Rivier, is wide and longer than the Liesbeek River. In addition to being a source of drinking water the river formed a protective barrier for farms. Prior to the Dutch settlers the river was an important spiritual site for the Khoi. The settlers built fence-joined forts along its banks to help prevent livestock theft by Khoi and to keep them from their ancestral grazing lands. The Black River today is no longer deep enough for barges to sail up but provides a home to many water birds and larger species like pelicans and flamingos.