

When is a drought not a drought?

Dr Sue Milton-Dean & Dr W. Richard J. Dean

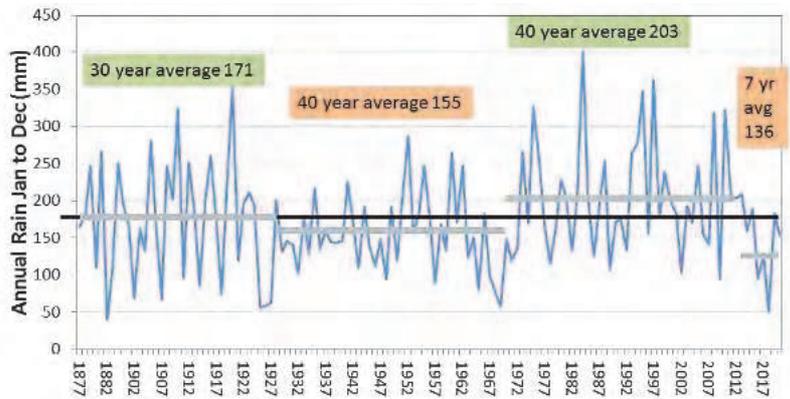
What is the opposite of a drought? There is no word to describe it. This is because a “drought” is just a dry patch in a series of “normal” rainfall years. There can be floods in the middle of a drought, when unseasonal heavy rains fall, or a few days of rain and cool and cloudy weather, but this is temporary relief, and what we really want is to return to getting regular average rainfall. The rain that we have received within the past few days has been very welcome, and wonderful as it is, has not entirely broken the drought and given us a free pass to use as much water as we can. There is a long way to go. The veld has responded rapidly to the rain, and for the shallow-rooted plants in the rangelands, the drought has broken for the time being. So we are looking at this drought in the light of the 20 years from 1992 to 2012, when rainfall here was, in general, above average (see graph).

For the people of the village, the drought has not had the impact that it might have had – water has been available to all of us throughout the drought, but not in large quantities, and should be carefully used. Rainfall has been recorded in Prince Albert since the late 1880s. It has always varied greatly between years, but there

have been long periods of above and below average rainfall. From 1930 until 1970 conditions were generally dry with an average of 155 mm/year. From 1971 until 2014 rainfall was generous averaging 203 mm/year. Then from 2015 onwards drought has prevailed and rainfall has averaged 136 mm/year.

To explain the graph, it shows an average rainfall with some “wet” years and very low years for the 30 years from 1877 to 1926, followed by 40 years of below average rainfall, again with some wet years, but mostly dry years, and after that 40 years of highs and lows (mostly highs), giving the impression that Prince

cont. on pg. 5/...



★★★★★

Nieuwewerf

*Enjoy the tranquility of Prince Albert
Contact us for rates and special offers*

Meals are available on request from our in-house chef

tranquil luxury accessible self-catering

50 Nieuwe Street | Nieuwestraat 50

+27 (71) 095 1442 nieuwewerf@gmail.com www.nieuwewerf.com

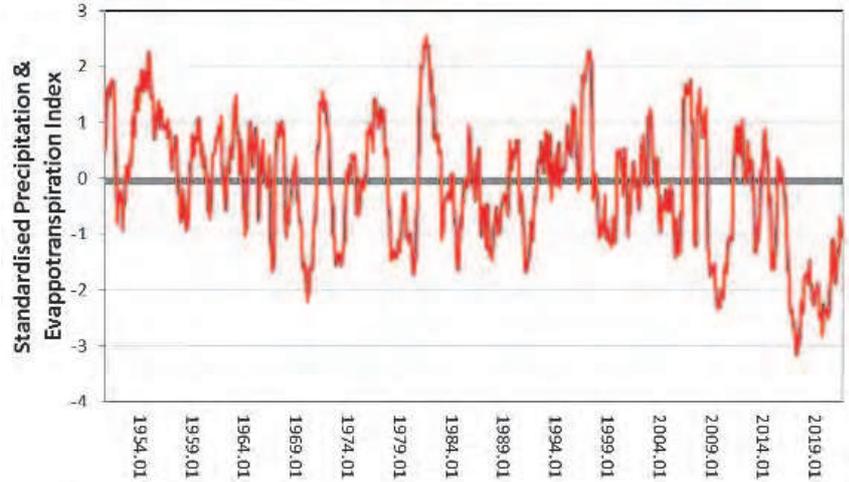
from pg. 3/ When is a drought...

Albert had plenty of water. All the years below the thick black line on the graph are droughts. The last few years, as we all know, have been disastrously dry, and should be a time for all of us to save water. There is not much water, but there are lots of potential users. The population is increasing, the number of houses, swimming pools and green lawns are increasing, all with pressure on what we have in the way of water.

Much of the rain, and the thin trickle out of the Swartberg is not used by the people of the village anyway. Most of the rain that falls returns to the atmosphere through evaporation and water loss from the leaves of plants (evapotranspiration). The higher the temperatures and the lower the humidity, the more rapidly moisture evaporates. Drought conditions are therefore not caused only by low rainfall but also by high temperatures. Climate change is resulting in warmer winters and hotter summers. In the past 10 years there have been few snowfalls on the Swartberg and we have felt summer temperatures climbing to 43°C. When low rainfall is combined with high temperatures the drought becomes more severe and many plants die as they have done in Prince Albert over the past six years. It also becomes practically impossible to maintain a lawn as high temperatures rapidly

evaporate the water.

The graph below is the Standardised precipitation and evapotranspiration index for Prince Albert from 1951- 2021. It shows how rising temperatures and low rainfall together have increased the severity of drought in Prince Albert. For more about this drought index see <https://spei.csic.es/home.html>



The recent rain has freshened up gardens, and the overflowing furrow has certainly given the impression that the drought is over. Let us not get complacent. Drought has long lasting effects. The rain we have had is probably the largest rainfall we have received during the past five years, and followed by cool and cloudy days has benefitted the local rangelands. However, it may be the last rain we get for a while, and we need to bank it, not spend it. ●

Klaarstroom Gets Binned

Barbara Castle

During a recent inspection of the family park’s facilities in Klaarstroom, Cllr Linda Jaquet noticed that there were no rubbish bins in the park. And certainly none colourfully painted by Prince Albert artist Kevin de Klerk.

She decided there and then to sponsor a bin or two. There was one site in the park which already had the support poles for a bin so she contacted Kevin on her return and not too long after that a new bin, encouraging residents to conserve water, was installed at the park. ●



Newly designed bin installed at Klaarstroom family park by (l-r) Kevin de Klerk, Cllr Linda Jaquet, Cllr Stoffel Botes, Duke Kaufman and Cllr Sidney Koonthea. Photo: Ju-vante Michaels

SWARTBERG SATELLITE SERVICES

(Since 1988)

We specialize in:

- Supply & installation of all DSTV equipment incl. extra view PVR.
- All maintenance, modifications and extensions.
- Repairs to TV, DVD, & Home Theatre.

Contact:
Johan Mulder
Petrus Bostander
Tel: 023 5411 985
Cell: 074 9131 613
082 4497 692