

INTRODUCTION TO WALKS

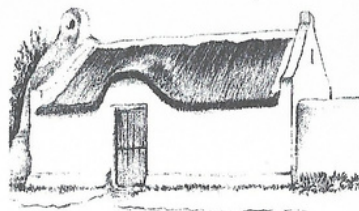
McGregor is a charming village still embedded in the amber of yesteryear. Some liken it to Brigadoon of the popular musical, that fabled Scottish village which only reveals itself to outsiders every hundred years. Indeed, once you cross the little bridge at the bottom of the main street you do find yourself in another world ...

Some say McGregor lies at the end of a road to nowhere, ignoring the fact that a dirt road does detour around the Riversonderend Mountains to join the N2 south of Swellendam, and that a good tar road connects it with Robertson. But it would not be true for another reason because McGregor is very definitely "somewhere".

The first impression is of thatched roofs and white-washed walls, many of which have been awarded the status of National Monument (NM). There are also gracious double-storey Victorian facades decorated with broekie lace. There are splashes of colour from poinsettias and bougainvillea matched by homes painted sienna and daffodil, augmented in the oudorp by pepper-tree green and sky-blue. Lei-water gurgles along street-side channels (in years of good rains, that is) filling small irrigation dams, home to ducks and waterblommetjies.

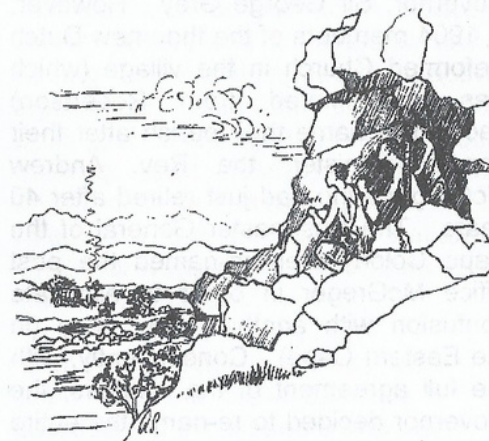
There are ancient oaks, remnant orchards of gnarled apricot trees guarded here and there by quince hedges (syrup made from the pips saved many of the villagers during a virulent outbreak of enteritis) and new plantings of olives. Scattered stands of whippy bamboo remind the visitor of one of McGregor's primary exports at the turn of the century. The long flexible poles were used throughout the country by drivers of ox-carts, and on trolley buses in Europe. The McGregor Museum has one old invoice which was found in the attic of an 1862 house built by a whipstock grower (no.21, walk B).

A second impression is of friendliness, openness and welcome. As you explore these four suggested walks around McGregor, you'll be greeted by smiles, open doorways and happy animals.



If you choose to drive, please go slowly and remember that dogs, piglets and chickens (and smaller children) expect you to steer round them.

City ways, unfortunately, have arrived but instead of the night air being rent by burglar alarms, you can listen to the haunting call of the spotted eagle owl (often perched on a stop sign in Voortrekker Street) and the awesome silence of a sky simply covered in stars.



How did McGregor begin? The /Xian or Bushmen were the first to move through the area, following old game trails over the Riversonderend mountains to the sea, and other groups followed.

But it wasn't until farmers moved in at the end of the 18th century, taking advantage of its Little Karoo climate (low rainfall but plenty of mountain water, hot

summers and winter temperatures that rarely dip below freezing) that it started to become known to white settlers.

Farmers built dams to store mountain run-off and arguments over water rights were being fought in the courts from the end of the 18th century. A couple of these, translated from the High Dutch, are on file in the Museum in the Tourism Office, corner Voortrekker and Kerk Streets.

Vines have been extremely successful in the district. Early varieties produced sultanas, raisins and table grapes, leading to new cultivars and production of some of the best and most reasonably priced wines in the world.

Sheep graze on the aromatic fynbos, proteas and a wide variety of fruit and vegetables is farmed. Outside Robertson, the rich Boland grass has proved ideal for breeding fine horses.

Missionaries from the Moravian settlement at Genadendal, near Greyton, certainly crossed the mountains to hold services in the early part of the 1800s and sub-divisions of farms were being implemented by 1821. The township register was first opened in 1862 but by the mid-1800s the village was already taking shape.



In those days it was called Lady Grey in tribute to the wife of the British Governor, Sir George Grey. However, in 1904 members of the then new Dutch Reformed Church in the village (which was administered from Robertson) decided to name their parish after their popular minister, the Rev. Andrew McGregor, who had just retired after 40 years. The Postmaster General of the Cape Colony then re-named the post office McGregor in order to eliminate confusion with another Lady Grey (in the Eastern Cape). Consequently, with the full agreement of the villagers, the Governor decided to re-name the entire village on 9th April 1906.

McGregor's fame is spreading. In April 2004, the Laird of the Scottish Clan, Sir Malcolm MacGregor, paid the first of what he promises will be several visits to the village. The name can be traced back to 840 AD and the first Gregor, who bore the kingly motto "S. Rioghal Mo Dhream" or "My Race is Royal".

The group of inter-related West Highland Scottish families who became the Clan McGregor have a long and turbulent history, and interested visitors can read about the Clan and the Rev. Andrew McGregor in the Museum. While there, do pick up the anecdotal booklet "Memories & Myths About McGregor" - it's full of fascinating information.

The Museum has an authentic King James Bible (1639), donated by village resident Ray Gregory, which is not on display at the moment.

Wherever you turn in McGregor, you are treated to spectacular views of mountains: the Langeberg in the north, the Riviersonderend in the south, the gentle krantz nature reserve to the west and the extensive Vrolijkheid nature reserve to the east. Here, hiking trails stretch for 24 km and two bird hides provide wonderful sun-downer viewing (don't forget the mosquito repellent) overlooking dams where you can fish for bass.

Yes, but what do you do in McGregor? Plenty! There are many artists, potters and craftspeople and thriving home-based industries turning out everything from attractive garments to jams and olive tapenades. There are church activities, sports events including cycling, a walking group, a small weekly bridge club, Scottish country dancing, yoga classes, meditation and pilates, musical evenings, braais and fund-raising events for charities such as the Hospice, Friends of C.A.R.E (animal welfare), Wahnfried (the village's own venue for world-class classical music and movies) and the Eseltjesrus Donkey Sanctuary.

If you are lucky, you may see (and hear) the brass band as it parades along the streets or down to the cemetery. And if you're around on a Saturday morning, visit the small market which takes place from 9 a.m. on the corner of Voortrekker and Kerk. You can pick up a home-made chicken pie to munch on your walk, or some local cheese and a loaf hot from a wood-fired oven. But be warned. Everything sells out early.



Mainly though, just enjoy the peace, the vistas of natural beauty, the peace, cats sunning themselves on window-ledges, the chance to chat to strangers and yes, have we mentioned it already? The peace!

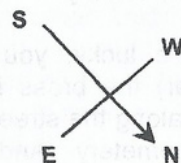
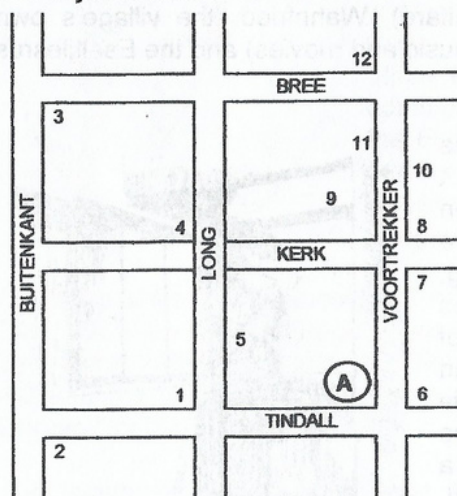
CHURCH WALK A.

Starting from the corner of Voortrekker and Tindall Streets, turn south-east along Tindall and stroll down to the Methodist Church and Hall (1) on the next corner.

It is still as it was when built in 1885, with arched windows and doors shaded by old gumtrees.



Opposite is a house with new gables, and further along on the left, on the corner, is a really old cottage (2) originally restored by the McGregor Heritage Society, but sadly not maintained by the owners. Opposite this, is a garden wall incorporating more modern 21st century artefacts!

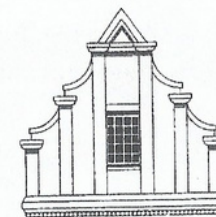


Turn right up Buitenkant and you'll find a pink house (3) reputed to be the oldest European-built house in the village. Retrace your steps, turn left into Kerk and then right into Long by Almond Cottages (4), the oldest of which was built in 1860.

As you move down Long, on the left and set back from the road behind rows of olive trees is a house (5) built during the 1990s of straw bales plastered with mud.

Turn left again into Tindall and then next left into Voortrekker again, on the corner of which is what was the Methodist parsonage (6), and stop shortly before the corner of Kerk.

On the right is the Tourism Office, Museum and Municipal offices (7), housed in a National Monument (NM) building which boasts a Neo-classic-style gable with six pilasters, made famous by a Pierneef painting and typical of those built in South Africa during 1860-1885. On the opposite corner is what was the village's third generation post office, now cleverly converted for commercial purposes (8).



The original post-office, serviced by donkey cart from Villiersdorp, is reputed to have been on the farm Ouplaas on the north-western side of the village, serving an area called Over den Berg, before the founding of the town. The second post office was housed in the little ACVV building below the Tourism Office. The Museum has an envelope franked Lady Grey and dated 1861.

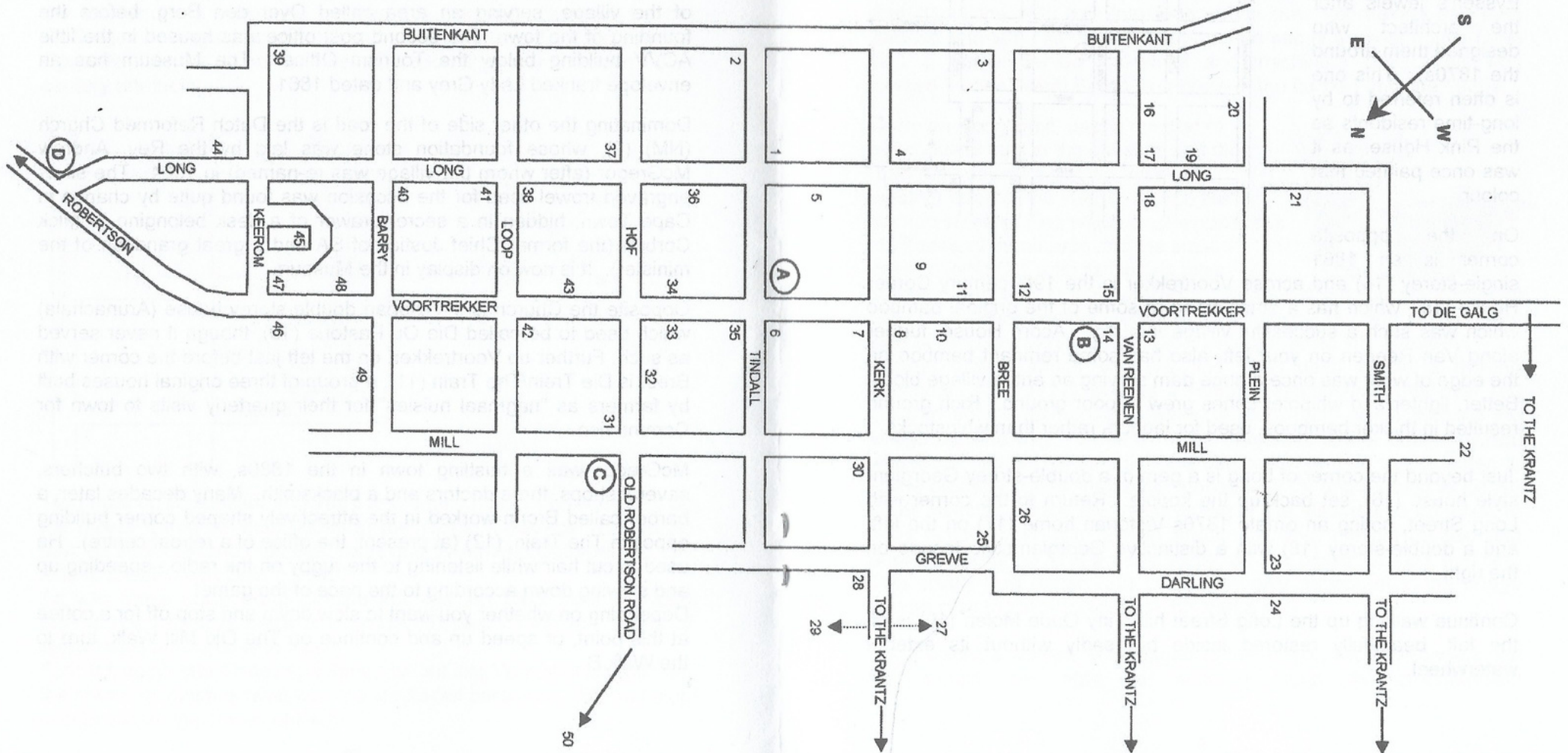
Dominating the other side of the road is the Dutch Reformed Church (NM) (9), whose foundation stone was laid by the Rev. Andrew McGregor (after whom the village was re-named) in 1904. The silver engraved trowel used for the occasion was found quite by chance in Cape Town, hidden in a secret drawer of a desk belonging to Mick Corbett (the former Chief Justice of SA and a great grandson of the minister). It is now on display in the Museum.

Opposite the Church is a Victorian double-storey house (Arunachala) which used to be called Die Ou Pastorie (10), though it never served as such. Further up Voortrekker, on the left just before the corner with Bree, is Die Trein/The Train (11), a group of three original houses built by farmers as "nagmaal huisies" for their quarterly visits to town for Communion.

McGregor was a bustling town in the 1880s, with two butchers, several shops, three doctors and a blacksmith. Many decades later, a barber called Bronn worked in the attractively shaped corner building opposite The Train, (12) (at present, the office of a retreat centre). He used to cut hair while listening to the rugby on the radio - speeding up and slowing down according to the pace of the game!

Depending on whether you want to slow down and stop off for a coffee at this point, or speed up and continue on The Old Mill Walk, turn to the Walk B.

The Village of McGregor



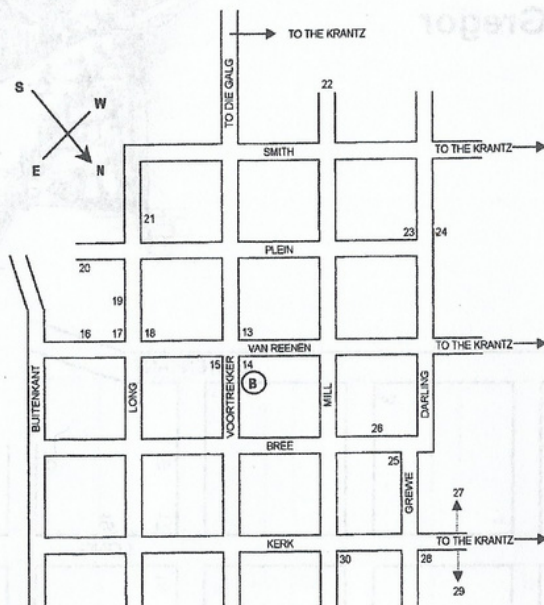
OLD MILL WALK No.B

Start at the corner of Voortrekker and Van Reenen, and admire three very early village houses. On the right is a double storey Victorian (13) (one of the "platdaks" known as Van Eyssen's jewels after the architect who designed them around the 1870s). This one is often referred to by long-time residents as the Pink House, as it was once painted that colour.

On the opposite corner is an 1861 single-storey (14) and across Voortrekker is the 19th century Corner House (15), which has a small stand of some of the original bamboo which was such a successful village industry. Acorn House, further along Van Reenen on your left, also has some remnant bamboo on the edge of what was once a huge dam serving an entire village block. Better, lighter and whippier canes grew in poor ground. Rich ground resulted in thicker bamboos, used for ladders rather than whipstocks.

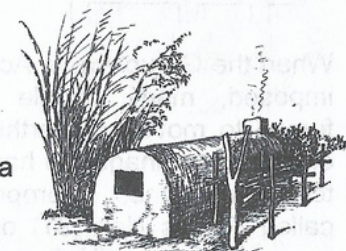
Just beyond the corner of Long is a gem of a double-storey Georgian-style house (16), set back up the koppie. Return to the corner with Long Street, noting an ornate 1870s Victorian home (17) on the left, and a double-storey (18) with a distinctive Georgian-style facade on the right.

Continue walking up the Long Street hill. Tiny Oude Molen (19) is on the left, beautifully restored inside but sadly without its exterior waterwheel.



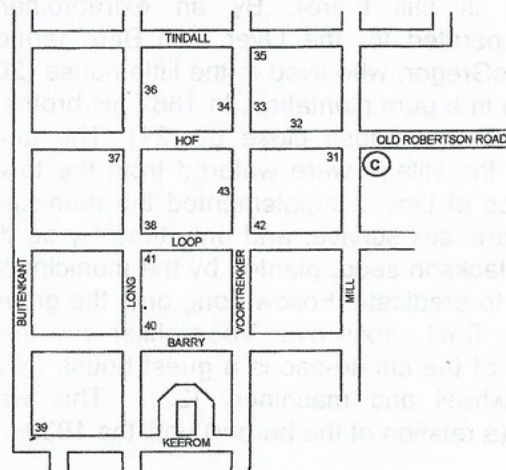
In the 1820s this was turned by water rushing down from a weir above Rheebofskraal (the furrow is still there). By an extraordinary coincidence, the mill was operated for the Over Den Berg farmer owners by a man named MacGregor, who lived in the little house (20) higher up the hill, half hidden in a gum plantation. In 1862 his brother, who dealt in whipstocks, built his house close by (21). The gum plantations at the bottom of the village were watered from the town dam (Vaaldam) and the sales of timber supplemented the municipal income. Many stands of gums still survive, and unfortunately so do the progeny of 5lbs. of Port Jackson seed, planted by the municipality in 1922, and proving difficult to eradicate. Follow Long onto the gravel and round the right turn into Smit, cross over Voortrekker and then turn left into Mill. At the top of the cul-de-sac is a guest house (NM) with a well-preserved mill-wheel and machinery (22). This was worked by one Alwyn Bronn (a relation of the barber) until the 1930s.

Carry on along Smit, past a number of new houses built in the old style and then turn right down Darling on the north-western edge of the village. Notice the packed stone walling which once enclosed a 19th century farmhouse and the small cottage (NM) (23) with its Norfolk pine standing sentinel by the front door. Further down, on the corner of Bree, is another original Georgian-style house (25), and on the other side of Bree is a very old barn (26), now converted into a pottery. Further down Darling you will find what used to be a thriving secondary school (27), built as a boarding establishment for over 100 children from Western Cape farms, an enterprise which boosted the village considerably. Close by is the unmarked site of one of several whipstock ovens (28) in which the bamboo was fired to straighten it. In the process, it was frequently rubbed with fat and paraffin to kill the borer insects. There are still artisans in the village who continue to build houses with cob. Do an about-turn from the cul de sac and another talking point is a block away, on the corner of Kerk and Mill. This solidly built house (30) boasts the only pavement in the village and an arch that obviously once housed a bell.



No, it wasn't a school. It belonged to the mayor, who presumably felt he should be able to summon help in emergencies!

OLD GAOL WALK No. C



The Old Gaol and Lady Grey Walks take you past some of the oldest village houses and through the lively Oudorp.



When the Group Areas Act was imposed, many people were forced to move. Nevertheless, one family managed to hang on to their home, appropriately called Page's Halt (31) on the corner of Kantoor (Hof) and Mill.

As you walk eastwards along Kantoor, don't overlook one of the smallest cottages in McGregor (32). It has an almond tree near the front door, but there are no windows looking onto the street.

Turn right into Voortrekker and note what must be one of the most unusual prize-winning gardens in front of any police station (33) in South Africa, complete with pond and hanging potjie. There are no gnomes any more - they must have gone travelling - but it has had rabbits on the lawn and a sign on the gate saying "Come In".

Opposite is an authentic double-storey Victorian building (34) which used to house the only bank in McGregor. Further along, on the corner of Tindall, is an old Victorian-style building (35) which has been given a new lease of life by its owners.

Turn left into Tindall and then left again into Long. The diverse group of houses on the left has great character, and the middle one (36) is the house where Piet October lived for many years. Mr October's mayorship spanned the country's first democratic elections in 1994.

In an intriguing geographic juxtaposition, on the corner across Hof is the house (37) where Marais Viljoen, a former State President of SA, was born. It has since been split into several dwellings. On the next corner, on the left, is an imposing 1899 building (38) which served as gaol and magistrate's court.



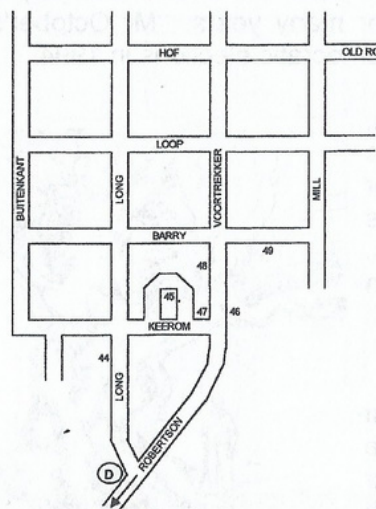
We'll be returning to this spot, so first turn right into Loop and admire the amazing variety of vernacular architecture of the cottages on both sides of the street, their gardens crammed with pomegranate and loquat trees and all kinds of flowering shrubs.

Turn left into Buitenkant, cross over Barry and pause to admire the majestic peppertrees (39) on the left, which were already huge in 1945. Turn left into Keerom, left again into Long, noting on the corner of Barry the way this house (40) nestles into the ground rather than standing on top of it. Walking on up Long takes you past what is enigmatically called the Dower House (41). It pre-dates 1899 and its stately palms might well have been the inspiration for the facade of the Old Gaol opposite.

Turn right along Loop, passing the house once occupied by the policeman who guarded the gaol, and left again to meander up Voortrekker. On the right are several late 1800s buildings (42), housing a thriving school.

Opposite is what was originally a Victorian single-storey house with a pitched roof (43). It was extended in the 1920s and turned into an inn.

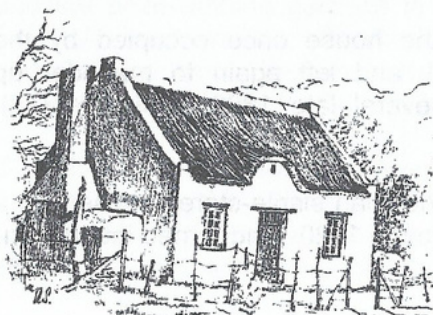
LADY GREY & GRAVEYARD WALK No. D



As you cross the bridge at the entrance to McGregor, the road forks into two. Take the left hand one, which will guide you past terraces of brightly painted Cape cottage-style homes (44), built by the Municipality for renting to villagers.

Turn right into Keerom where, perhaps, the initiative and sense of individual village pride of the coloured population really shows its spirit.

On the left is a small circular road (45) which welcomes you into the very heart of the community. While "low cost housing" in many areas of the country is synonymous with little square boxes, "all made out of ticky-tacky and all looking just the same" (to quote those singers, Nina & Frederik), here is a group of 1990s houses where every gable is different, every architectural accent is quirky and fun, and yet every aspect is fundamentally "McGregor style".



If you are in a car, do go very slowly as animals and children expect you to navigate round them.

On this Lady Grey walk, you will see a number of examples of the rough palmiet thatching, the bulbous outside chimneys and wooden windows set deep into walls half a metre thick.

The circle brings you back into Keerom and on the next corner, as you turn up Voortrekker, you will see three of the oldest McGregor cottages facing each other. On the right is the Lady Grey (46) and on the left a reed thatched National Monument, the Sir George Grey (47). Further up is the restored Lion House (48), named for the lions couchant flanking the steps.

Turn right into Barry, and you will be walking alongside a small estate of old and old-style cottages. Some are National Monuments, such as Sunflower and Pear Tree (49), and here and there are survivors of the orchard of old mulberry trees which led to this part of the village being called Moerbeibakkie (or simply Bakkies) because the fruit was sold in bakkies or punnets.

Turn left into Mill and have a good look at two more, very old cottages on the left.

If you still have plenty of energy, turn second right into Kantoor (Hof) and wind down the hill flanked by three graveyards. There was separation, even in death, and the gravestones tell their own story about the families who lived, worked, loved and died in the village.

In the Methodist section (50), you can still see the little building where the body was laid on a platform of vleitjiesriet (marsh reeds) prior to burial, so that mourners could pay their last respects.

Funeral processions are often accompanied by the village's brass band ... a gentle musical reminder of the transience of life.

