

SESSION: Humanities in the South African National Antarctic Programme

MARS Themes:

Human Enterprise

Title:

Proposed project: Digitisation and preservation of Marion Island's hut books

Author(s): add rows below if more authors

M.H. Stander¹

E.M. Rudolph¹

A.M. Treasure²

C. Lavery³

R. Olivier⁴

M. Rossouw⁵

Affiliation: add rows below for more affiliations

¹Department of Geography, University of the Free State

²South African Polar Research Infrastructure, Stellenbosch University

³Department of English, University of Pretoria

⁴Department of Botany & Zoology, Stellenbosch University

⁵Art History and Image Studies, University of the Free State

Abstract:

Marion Island holds a unique cultural legacy through its field hut books, which chronicle daily life since the early 1990s. Despite their potential significance to South Africa's cultural heritage, these hardcopy records face the imminent threat of deterioration. This project, spanning geography, data management, image studies, archiving, and literature across three institutions, aims to digitise and systematically document Marion Island's hut books. The interdisciplinary collaboration will develop skills, fostering innovative methodologies and technologies while contributing to the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Strategy's capacity-building goals. The project balances the ethical challenges of digitisation with the imperative to preserve the unique narratives contained in the hut books. The digitised content promises rich insights into the social dynamics, environmental conditions, and personal experiences of Marion Island's inhabitants, benefitting both natural and social sciences. The methodology involves navigating the harsh conditions of remote field huts, necessitating an innovative approach to ensure high-quality digitisation, metadata management, and secure archiving. The project underscores the need for ethical considerations in digitising personal accounts, proposing strategies to protect privacy while allowing future access. The potential impact on public awareness and education is highlighted, aligning with strategic objectives in marine and Antarctic research initiatives. The preservation of these records is seen as a crucial step toward safeguarding South Africa's heritage, adhering to national legislation emphasising the cultural significance of historical documentation. The proposed project's dual objectives include digitising the hut books and exploring ethical archiving practices, paving the way for future research opportunities. This project, if approved, aim to collect, digitise, and store the hut book entries. Additionally, we aim to propose ways, either by embargo or other privatisation clauses, in which the content of the hut books might be accessed in the future by researchers whilst ensuring ethical practices, protection of privacy and the conservation of historical heritage. This abstract emphasises the collaborative nature of the project and encourages valuable inputs from the public, acknowledging the potential enrichment of the research through diverse perspectives and insights.

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Cultural heritage; Marion Island; Field hut books; Digitisation