

Hans Merensky

The Legend

Founder: Dr Hans Merensky 16/3/1871 – 21/10/1952

Geologist, Prospector, Scientist, Nature Conservationist, Philanthropist

If ever a man left in his passing, a legend of achievement and high renown, such a man was Hans Merensky

Born on 16 th March 1871 at his father's mission station – Botshabelo, near Middelburg in Mpumalanga , he was South Africa's most famous geologist; a great humanitarian; devotee of nature, afforestation and agriculture. What gave him his place in South African history is that he unearthed some of the greatest mineral deposits of their kind ever known to man.

These include the richest deposit of alluvial gem diamonds ever found at Alexander Bay in the arid wastes of Namaqualand; vast platinum and chrome reefs at Lydenburg, Rustenburg and Potgietersrus, which in turn produced some of the greatest platinum mines in the world; an immense vermiculite area, phosphates and copper at Phalaborwa in the north-east lowveld; gold in the Free State; and the world's biggest chrome deposit at Jagdlust, 80km south-east of Polokwane.



With a keen interest in minerals and a desire for outdoor living he chose to study mining geology when he finished his schooling in Germany . He fulfilled the requirements of a doctorate in mining geology from the University of Charlottenburg in Berlin .

After a few years working in Germany he returned to South Africa where he made a fortune on the stock exchange, was interned for the First World War, and penniless started all over again. In 1924, while in his fifties and heavily in debt, he made the first great discovery of platinum in the Lydenburg district and never looked back.

He lived out his days simply in the unostentatious Top House on his farm Westfalia, where he entertained the great of the land and foreign dignitaries with charm and hospitality.

In drawing up his will, he appointed Trustees to ensure that his life's work would be continued to maximum effect after his death. The major part of his assets was allotted to the Hans Merensky Trust in terms of a Trust Deed executed in May 1949.

By establishing a Trust, Dr Merensky had hoped to combine the two projects closest to him. Assurances had to be obtained for the continuation of his work in agriculture, horticulture and forestry operations on

the Westfalia Estate. These projects ensured that water and soil conservation, as well as the reclamation and revitalisation of the soil could be continued.

Secondly, Southern African people, and especially the employees of the Trust had to benefit from its activities. This was the crowning and probably the most satisfying achievement of his life, after his success in discovering the rich diamond fields of Namaqualand.

In his speech delivered at the opening of the Hans Merensky Library which he donated to the University of Pretoria, he acknowledges his debt to South Africa.

“This country has given me so much that I am only too happy to be allowed to help it to develop and to be able to give back to it a fraction of what it has given to me...”