Traces of the Khoekhoe:

Transhumance: The Dutch realised that they could not breed sheep in the Peninsula due to the lush growth of the pastures and even started breeding sheep on Robben Island. (Snijders 2011).

Transhumance between the mountains and the Karoo appeared in the 18th century. It was applied to the prevention of Horse sickness in the 19th century and between the Transvaal and Swaziland until the middle half of the 20th century. In the Wakkeringstroom/Utrecht districts farms were surveyed as summer and winter farms. This persisted into the 21st century.

The Cape Peninsula provided in summer a favourable climate for the Khoi and the cows provided essential milk for consumption. The Khoi exposure to cattle milk resulted in 50% lactose tolerance while the San has no lactose tolerance.

The Khoi could also gather plant bulbs and rhizomes.

Cattle: The Khoi used cattle for riding, milk, transport of e.g. matjieshuise. A seventeenth-century drawing shows a ‘nuclear’ family. The wife and child are riding the ox and there are dogs, sheep and goats.

Without cattle, the Dutch station would not have survived. The main use of oxen was the transport of wood from e.g. Houibay to Cape Town. Cattle also provided beef for the VOC fleet, some visiting fleets, as well as the locals.

The numbers of cattle and sheep that were traded are recorded but not the total number of livestock presented.

In November 1655 Van Riebeeck was informed that a very large group of people and their livestock had camped circa three ‘miles’ from the Castle and he decided to investigate. He found five to six thousand people, four to five hundred huts and innumerable cattle and sheep. The crowd of humans and beasts were so thick that the Dutch could barely pass through on horseback.

It has been postulated that there was a tremendous increase in livestock as a response to the VOC’s demands.

In a set of seventeenth-century drawings, The Khoikhoi at the Cape of Good Hope, a drawing of an African ox is included. The translation of the Dutch text reads:

“The African cattle are different in this way: except for the hump, if otherwise resembles a Siamese ox, because the oxen have the same form as the bulls at the Cape.

This form of cattle was also found on the island of Malagasy (Bos indicus). The fatter they are, the bigger the hump, because the hump consists solely of fat.”

The Editors’ notes read: “African cattle are a mixed breed. The indigenous wild cattle originally found in North Africa and the Saharan eight thousand years ago were very large, humpless animals. The humped zebu (Bos indicus) were introduced from Asia into Egypt since 1560 BC and interbred with the indigenous cattle. This so-called Sanga breed formed the basis of the cattle owned by the Khoikhoi and passed on to the white colonists, amongst whom they became known as Africanders.” (Afrikaners).

Thus, current breeds of cattle e.g. the Afrikaner, are derived from the Khoi cattle.

The Dutch had to import dairy cattle. The fatter they are, the bigger the hump, because the hump consists solely of fat.

Goats: The first goat from the Namaquas arrived in Cape Town in 1661.

The Khoi realized that goats survived well in arid regions and this animal became widespread. It was difficult to distinguish sheep and goat remains and the skeletal remains were often classified as Oviscapre." Travellers used goats as mobile dairies.

The South African Boerbok is an example of selection from the Khoen goats.

Dogs: The indigenous dogs were bred and crossed with European dogs. The Rhodesian Ridgeback is an example.

Language:

Examples: kirie, assegai.

The people:

The list of drawings of the 15th century Khoikhoi reflects the physical appearance, dress, their animals and customs.

The camp of a circle of ‘matjieshuis’, cattle and small stock within the circle form the cover page of a book “Khoekhoi and the origins of herding in South Africa.”

This essay is an extremely condensed and selective review of the anthropology, archaeology and pastoral peoples of the Cape. Examples include a review of Jan Antonisz van Riebeeck and the utilisation of Robben Island by the author which reflect inter alia the statistics of livestock trading, animal diseases and other challenges faced by the colonists.

Medicinal plants:

Buchu (Agathosma betulina) is the panacea for many ailments and is still gathered in the Cape today.

Buchu (or Boegey) was used by the Khoi with sheep fat as an ointment. Buchu brandy was a common household remedy of the early Dutch colonists and used for “stomach problems.” It is gathered and planted today.

Carl Peter Thunberg, Swedish MD, visited the Cape in 1772-1775, listed plants with their indications, toxicity and disease agents. He described that the Khoi placed a very high value on a plant they named ‘kanna’, that he named Scelitum tortuosum (Mesembryanthemum tortuosum). This plant elevates mood and reduces anxiety and stress.

This plant was first documented by Simon van der Stel in 1685.

Mountain and river names:

Examples are the Outeniqua mountain range and the Gariep River.

-kamma is the Khoi for river.

Southern African Humanties