An early report of buried treasure in Natal stems from events in May–June 1842 when the British were besieged by Boer forces at the site of the present-day Old Fort in Durban.\(^1\) The situation in the British camp was dire, with food supplies running low, and where every able-bodied man was pressed into service. The British commander, Captain Thomas Charlton Smith of the 27th Regiment, fearing the worst, instructed an elderly Zulu man in his employ to bury the regimental pay chest in the grounds of the camp. The Zulu employee carried out his orders to the letter. He stamped the soil down so vigorously that no trace of the burial site remained. When the situation stabilized, the Zulu man could not remember exactly where he had buried the chest. Much digging took place, but all to no avail. A later attempt to find the chest using a mine detector was made in 1947 by a Port Elizabeth treasure-hunter. Old bits of iron and other metal were unearthed, but no gold.

J. Forsyth Ingram, a well-known Pietermaritzburg resident and author, had an unusual, although frightening experience in 1893.\(^2\) Forsyth Ingram had a varied career, beginning as Chief Locust Officer in Natal, and subsequently including a spell as Chief Border Inspector and Clerk at the Paulpietersburg Magistrates’ Court. He also fought in the Anglo-Zulu and Anglo-Boer wars and took part in various other campaigns. Forsyth Ingram caught gold fever in the years before the turn of the 19th century. It was at this stage that Natal, like the rest of South Africa, became obsessed with finding gold following the first discovery of this precious metal on the Witwatersrand. Old tales of gold were resurrected, with one in particular coming to the attention of Forsyth Ingram.

Forsyth Ingram found himself, accompanied by three African assistants, in the border region of Natal and Zululand where the Buffalo (uMzinyati) River joins the Tugela (uThukela) River. Forsyth Ingram and his party first camped in wild, mountainous terrain near a large outcrop of pink quartz. Forsyth Ingram met an elderly Zulu induna or headman who knew where gold was to be found locally. The induna related how, in the days of his forefathers, some Portuguese (“yellow men”) had come from Inhambane in Mozambique to search for gold. They laboured for weeks on end, digging for the precious metal.

At that time, according to legend, a virulent disease swept through the countryside, killing most of the local people and all the miners. The survivors, blaming the miners, sealed up the mouth of the tunnel, leaving the bodies of the Portuguese inside. This account is probably misleading. A more realistic assumption is that there was some trouble between the local people and the miners. The Portuguese may have been murdered as they worked in the tunnel. A terrible epidemic was seemingly the explanation provided to account for the disappearance of the miners.

The induna showed Forsyth Ingram the entrance to the tunnel, which was covered by creepers and heaped stones. It took only a short while to open the tunnel. Forsyth Ingram stated that a ghastly sight met his eyes. The skeletons of about 12 miners,
along with the tools that they had used, were lying on the floor of the tunnel. Forsyth Ingram came across a large shaft in the floor, with a crude wooden ladder descending into the depths. Forsyth Ingram preferred his own coil of rope, and had himself lowered down the approximately 10 m deep shaft. The air in the shaft was stale and oppressive and Forsyth Ingram’s flickering torch began to go out. Sensing trouble, Forsyth Ingram called to his assistants to pull him up at once. His shouts were answered by a series of unearthly yells. The assistants dropped the rope and fled, resulting in Forsyth Ingram falling headlong to the bottom of the shaft. The screaming continued as he lay there. When his eyes adjusted to the gloom, he saw rows of gleaming eyes staring at him from every direction. The source of the eyes and the screaming became evident when Forsyth Ingram lit a match. Staring at him was a troop of baboons. Forsyth Ingram carefully climbed up the old ladder, which fortunately supported his weight. He lost no time in rushing out of the tunnel into the bright sunshine.

It was only later in the day that Forsyth Ingram was able to persuade his African assistants to re-enter the tunnel. The assistants killed most of the baboons while Forsyth Ingram looked for the working face of the gold mine. Forsyth Ingram found what he was seeking in the late afternoon, in the far corner of the lowest shaft. His smoking torch revealed tiny nuggets of gold scattered about in a heap of quartz and slate rubble. Forsyth Ingram pocketed as much of the rubble as he could, and called for his assistants to help him clear the debris away. The shouts of his assistants drew his attention to a particular spot, where he was nearly overcome by a cloud of gas (possibly methane) issuing from a small hole in the rock face. It seems that the activities of the party had uncovered the hole allowing the gas to escape. It was only with the greatest difficulty that Forsyth Ingram and his assistants were able to reach fresh air outside the tunnel.

Forsyth Ingram’s assistants flatly refused to go back into the mine the next day. The upper chamber of the mine had in the meantime become filled with gas, with gas also being detected in the trees outside the entrance to the tunnel. The local Zulu chief (inkosi) urged Forsyth Ingram to leave matters as they stood. Forsyth Ingram had to make do with about 4 oz. of gold in the rocks he had managed to salvage. He reported his findings to government officials on his return to Pietermaritzburg, although his application for a mining concession went unanswered. The tunnel was later re-sealed by the local people. It is known that there are several minor deposits of gold in what was previously referred to as KwaZulu Area No. 3, or the North Coast Hinterland/Tugela Valley. The gold is erratically distributed in vein and lode deposits, and is only suitable for smallholder production in a few instances. This was certainly the case in the second half of the 19th century when gold mining was underway in the uThukela River Valley. The tradition of a few rugged miners working a low-grade source, however, has virtually died out in South Africa.

Tuesday, 21 November 1939, was an enriching day for some in Pietermaritzburg. The scene of the action was at the corner of Boshoff and Pietermaritz streets. The property originally belonged to a prominent Natal lawyer, W. Tainton. The subsequent owners, E.V. Bateman and C.C. Allen, converted the building into a block of offices. Some Africans were digging in the garden that Tuesday afternoon, under the supervision of an Indian foreman. One of the gardeners suddenly thrust out both
hands filled with gold sovereigns covered in mud. There was a mad scramble for the coins, and a free-for-all began at once.

An excited white youngster observing the scene shouted out that buried treasure had been found. The call was repeated. The news spread rapidly along Boshoff, Pietermaritz and Church streets. Salesmen ran out of their shops, typists abandoned their typewriters, clerks left their ledgers and conductors jumped off their buses. Over 200 people arrived at the Bateman and Allen premises within minutes. Most of them were too late. A *Natal Witness* reporter hurried along to see what all the fuss was about. A South African Police constable was despatched to the scene as soon as word reached police headquarters in Loop (now Jabu Ndlovu) Street. The constable had very little success in recovering the coins. Instant amnesia descended on the crowd and the gardeners. Two unfortunate (although truthful) Africans were arrested on the spot. Batemen and Allen announced their intention of digging up the whole yard. Scores of public-spirited individuals appeared with spades, and were clearly anxious to relieve the owners of this boring and onerous task.

Only a few coins were “officially” recovered from the cache. Those coins with dates were all from the Victorian era, and were stamped with years ranging from 1840–80. So where did the money come from? No one believed that Tainton ever had any inclination to bury treasure. An old-time resident, C.T. Pieterse, claimed that the bag of coins was one of three packages of military pay amounting to £126 000 which were hidden in different places during the Anglo-Boer War, possibly when the Boers were advancing into Natal. There could be some validity in this belief since burial in the grounds of a readily identifiable premises belonging to a reputable lawyer was certainly a viable (and an astute) option. Another possibility is that the money was buried by a wealthy private individual who feared “rampaging Boers”. A third option, given the date of the coins, is that burial took place at some stage prior to the beginning of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899. What is not clear in all of these scenarios is why the money was never retrieved by the rightful owner. A final possibility is that the coins were illegally obtained, with the thief waiting until memories had faded before removing the loot. Death or some other misfortune may instead have intervened.

**NOTES**

2 Rosenthal, *The Hinges Creaked*, pp. 77–81. This account is very closely based on the original information published in Forsyth Ingram, J. *The Story of a Gold Concession, and Other African Tales and Legends* (Pietermaritzburg, W.H. Griffin, 1893) pp. 181–93. The locality of the mine was given in the second book as the Inyembi (Nyembi) Hill. A short article of relevance was published in the *Natal Witness* of 27 May 1999 (“Digging for wealth in Thukela valley”, written by V. Ward and M. Moberly). The point was made that prospectors searched for gold in several areas in Natal and Zululand in the mid-to-late 19th century. Particular attention was paid by the prospectors to the uThukela River Valley. It is stated that a C.J. Stewart was engaged in mining at Nyembi Hill at the confluence of the uThukela and uMzinyati rivers in 1868 (evidently not the same site described by Forsyth Ingram). A slightly different version is that Charles William Stewart announced that he had found gold at Nyembe Hill in November 1868 (Bulpin, T.V. *Natal and the Zulu Country*, third edition, Cape Town, T.V. Bulpin Publications, 1977, p. 232). A syndicate was established in Durban together with the Greytown Mineral Prospecting Company to finance the new gold field. Many well-known prospectors such as Edward Button, W. Marshall, Antonia Moriss, George Parsons and Ludwig Schwikkar dashed to the scene and began digging. Several Government officials and spectators were on hand to watch Stewart sink the shaft which he hoped would bring riches. Further information is that the *Natal Witness* issued an “Extra” on 16 March 1869 reporting a strike of gold quartz in the uThukela River Valley (Shuter, *Englishman’s Inn*, p. 82). A number of Australian gold-seekers arrived in Durban, apparently in 1869, having been attracted by reports of gold in the (future) Rhodesia (Bulpin, *Natal and the Zulu Country*, pp. 233–4). The Australians, after disappointment elsewhere, made their way to Stewart’s mine. Stewart, by this time, was working at the bottom of a somewhat deep shaft. The Australians examined the samples and advised Stewart that if dug any deeper, he would probably reach Australia. The Australians then left in disgust. In June 1873 Thomas Baines, the well-known Victorian artist, naturalist and explorer in southern Africa, prospected along the banks of the uThukela River on behalf of the South African Goldfields Company. Baines and a companion, C.F. Osborne, visited Stewart’s abandoned workings. The pair cleared the shaft of debris and dead reptiles and collected samples. They found quartz with traces of gold, but not in viable amounts. Bulpin goes on to discuss other gold prospecting ventures, notably further down the uThukela River in the valley of a tributary (the Mfongosi). The greater profitability of the gold deposits on the Witwatersrand resulted in most prospectors leaving Natal, with its non-payable or very marginal gold mines.


4 Rosenthal, *The Hinges Creaked*, pp. 69–70. Rosenthal does not cite the source of his information which was probably the *Natal Witness*. Some issues of the paper, including November 1939, could not be found in the newspaper collection of the Msunduzi Municipal Library.

Readers should note that a number of books on South African history, anthropology and literature can be read online and usually downloaded from a very useful American website. In the case of the two books written by J. Forsyth Ingram, log on to http://archive.org/details/storyofgoldconce00ingria as well as http://archive.org/details/colonyofnataloff00ingr. Those seeking specific details of a
particular book should Google the author and title of the work. Carefully examine the first few Google pages to find the desired website http://archive.org/...