

MONUMENT TRAILS

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History at school or university can be fun? A lot of people in the street will not agree with this statement, because of the way they experienced history at school. Lots of people think history is a boring subject until they get hooked on history.

Can history at school or university be fun? Yes, of course. It all depends on the attitude of the teacher or lecturer. By using a monument trail we can add to the fun in the classroom. History-fun that will be remembered for life. Historical fun that can change the student's attitude for life. Thus if you are a history teacher/lecturer I dare you to take your students on a monument trail.

The teacher must visit the monuments or historical sites before the time of the monument trail. The teacher must know what to expect, how long it is going to take to complete this trail, which oral questions to ask the learners during the day and which questions to ask on the worksheet. Please remember that a map of the area will help the learners to understand the program of the day. The map can be given to the learners while travelling in the bus.

Planning your monument trial will take some effort. What should be considered? Chronological events versus logical and financial reasoning. Time available will be one of the most important factors to be considered when planning the monument trial. Who will be the presenters? Will you take the second or third year students on this monument trial? Will this be the actual lesson or will this be a type of revision?

A monument trail can be done in several different ways. The chosen manner will be determined by aspects such as logical thinking, reality or finance. It could be done in chronological order or it could be done logically from the farthest to the nearest monument/site. It could also be only a venue such as a battlefield or a concentration camp site or it could follow a sequence of events such as the Anglo Boer War.

In the Vereeniging area I would start at the farthest place and this case it will be the Witkop blockhouse between Alberton and Meyerton. The order in which historical sites will be visited, will depend on their distance from the block house. Next in line will be the garden of Remembrance, followed by the concentration camp site, the old railway bridge pillars, the gravestones of Boer women and children who died in the concentration camp, the Freedom Statue in the CBD of Vereeniging and lastly the area where the Treaty of Vereeniging was negotiated. All the above-mentioned are part of the Anglo Boer War. The above-mentioned will be the cheapest method. If you want to stick to the chronological order of events, it will at least double the transport costs. The distance travelled will be at least twice that of a single trip. The problem will be that the students will spend more time in the bus travelling, than actually visiting the monuments or historical sites.

By using the logical monument trial method, it will be possible to add other irrelevant, but interesting history to the tour plan. In the Vereeniging area the Redan Etches, sandstone pavements in the CBD and the Centenary Monument of the Great Trek and the Sharpeville Exhibition Centre could be added to the trail.

If you run out of time, due to questions and the interest of the learners, it is easy to adapt. Thus instead of having a problem, you just skip a historical venue/event. The golden rule in planning your monument trial is to rather plan for an hour extra, than running short with 5 minutes. Remember that there is a small chance that these students will ever visit these sites again. Thus 10 minutes spend extra at a venue is 10 minutes well spent.

Who will be the presenters in this case? Once again the choices are varied. A monument trail could be presented by the teacher/lecturer, the curator of the relevant museum, any person who has a particular interest in the subject, or even the learners/students. In the case of the latter the learners/students can perform role play, or present short selected parts of the topic.

Who will go with on this monument trial? The Anglo Boer War forms part of the syllabus of the second year group at the NWU (Vaal Triangle). Thus logically the students to go on this monument trial will be the second years. In schools I think it is the best to tour with learners who have already chosen the subject. If you are canvassing learners to study history, the grade 9 learners will be the right group to take with. Furthermore if you want to experience a "problem" free day doing fieldwork, don't take any passengers with. A passenger is a student who is not interested in the subject and only goes with because he/she has nothing else to do.

The monument trial can be used as a form of revision, which I prefer or the actual lesson could be taught in the field. The number of historical sites in your area will determine the method used.

The biggest mistake a teacher/lecturer can make is to ignore a "Monument Trail", because that keeps the students/learners from experiencing History physically and emotionally.

Lastly, it could be done in place of an actual lesson, or used as a method of revision.

History can be a fun subject. Correction - history is a fun subject.

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Photo of Witkop blockhouse by Igmar Grewar