

# The French connection

Glenn Flanagan's passion for France has benefited KZN



“I HAVE always been a Francophile,” says Glenn Flanagan from her office at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) where she is a senior lecturer in French. Flanagan has almost single-handedly created a cultural tourism project commemorating the death of the Prince Imperial of France in KwaZulu-Natal in 1879.

We are surrounded by evidence of Flanagan's work over the past 13 years. Bright flags commemorating La Route du Prince Impérial, Louis Napoléon hang over a balcony overlooking a rose garden where two specially cultivated Prince Imperial roses grow among others.

Quilts made by the uQweqwe community who live near the site of the prince's monument, which is close to Vryheid, decorate the walls inside. Documents of all kinds cover the room. All these projects have been generated by Flanagan herself.

“I was inspired by my French lecturer at the then University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Francois Chupin, whose enthusiasm for all things French was instrumental in firing my own love of the subject,” Flanagan explains. After graduation, Flanagan taught French at a number of schools around the city.

When she heard the story of the death of the Prince Imperial, Louis Napoléon, in Zululand from a colleague in 1993, she decided to do a Franco-Zulu class excursion to the site of his death. Previously Flanagan had travelled the Route Napoléon through France and the idea of a cultural tourist route stayed with her. When Flanagan joined the DUT in 1994, the seed took root at the neglected site of the Prince Imperial's monument.

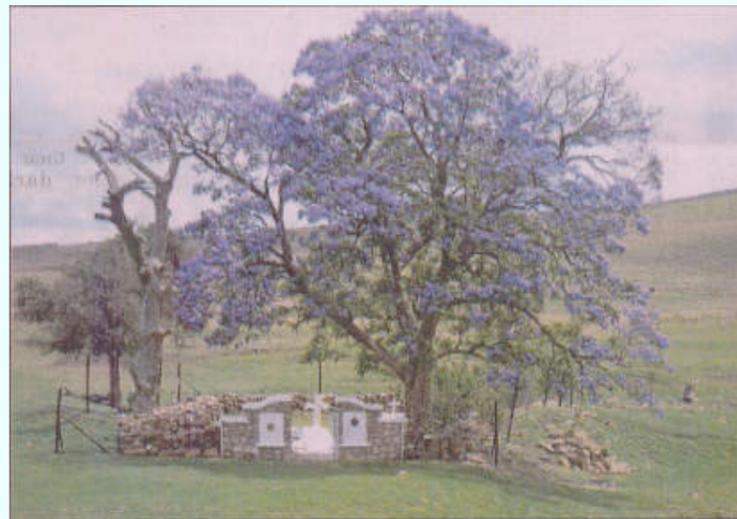
Flanagan gathered supporters for her plan for a Franco-Zulu cultural tourism project. After obtaining permission from the director of the DUT at that time, Graham Myers, Flanagan consulted experts in the tourism, cultural, historical and heritage fields. She credits especially Jean-Claude Lachnitt of the Napoléon Foundation in France, John Laband and the South African ambassador in France for helping her set up the route.

“Since its inception in 1996, this project has been working for and with the rural community in uQweqwe. About 6 000 people live near the monument,” Flanagan says. “This project has brought a steady stream of benefits to them since it started. Volunteer workers come over regularly from France and Germany. The French Embassy in South Africa gives practical assistance such as money for books for the



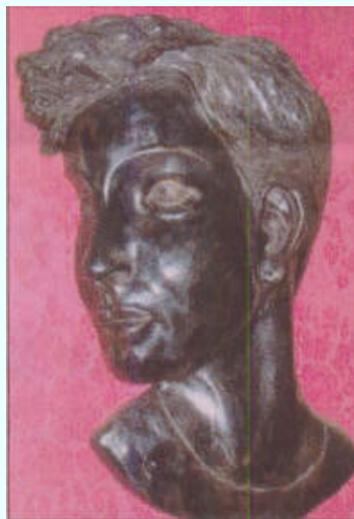
Photos: SUPPLIED

Glenn Flanagan (right) in the vegetable garden that the uQweqwe gogos established from donated seeds and through Marion Soreil, a visiting French student from the city of Gap, in the south of France, which is an important traffic junction on the French Route Napoléon.



ABOVE: The Prince Imperial monument at uQweqwe, near Vryheid.

ABOVE, RIGHT: A sculpture of the young prince by Priscille de Charmoy, an artist from Pietermaritzburg



local school. Sewing machines have been donated so that a quilting project can be launched. Four classrooms and a number of toilets have also been built through donations to the project.”

The monument itself is unique in that it was commissioned and paid for by an English Queen, Victoria, for a French prince who was killed by Zulu warriors at the end of the Anglo-Boer war. “Queen Victoria was very fond of Louis Napoléon and was devastated by his death. She cancelled her engagements for only the second time in her life when she heard of his death. The only other time she'd cancelled engagements was when Albert died.”

Flanagan has travelled extensively across the world at her own expense, to set up multicultural links to the project with England, Switzerland, Corsica, India, Canada, St Helena, Spain, Mauritius, Reunion, Germany, Austria and Australia.

The route, listed in three French travel guides to South Africa, traces the footsteps of Louis Napoléon from the time of his arrival in Pietermaritzburg in April 1879, through to his death as an aide de camp to Lord Chelmsford, in a skirmish in the Jojosi valley on June 1, 1879.

Places of interest in and around Pietermaritzburg relating to the prince and his mother, Empress Eugenie, who visited the site of her

only son's death, are many. Both the prince and the empress stayed at the Old Government House; the prince attended mass at St Mary's Chapel and his body lay in state there after his death; St Mary's Parish Church was financed partly by a donation from the empress; and the Imperial Hotel was named after the prince. The French Presence Exhibition, collated by Flanagan, is on show at the Msunduzi Museum. The route culminates in the historic monument near the hills of Jojosi.

• For more information on the French presence in Pietermaritzburg, visit the website <http://www.princeimperial.co.za/>

# EFFORTS HAVE NOT GONE UNNOTICED

FLANAGAN'S efforts on behalf of a long dead prince have not gone unnoticed.

She has been awarded the equivalent of a knighthood: the Chevalier de L'Ordre National du Mérite by the French Ambassador, Tristan D'Albis.

She is a Fellow of the International Napoleonic Society, and has received medals from the Institut des Hautes Études de la Défense Nationale as well as from the Collège de L'Enseignement Supérieur de l'Armée de Terre.

Flanagan won the KwaZulu-Natal Best Tourist Guide of the Year for 2003/4. She is an honorary member of both the Alliance Française, Pietermaritzburg and the Association des Amis du Musée Municipal Napoléonien d'Art et d'Histoires Militaires, Fontainebleau.

She has also been given the Colin Webb Award for Individual Merit for the Promotion of Heritage Awareness and is an Associate of the Msunduzi Museum, Pietermaritzburg.

