

# Commercial development for Midmar Dam

ANYONE passing Midmar Dam during the past few months cannot have failed to notice the construction work which took place below the damn wall.

*Village Talk* was privileged to be granted an interview with Avril O'Twit of Umgeni Water and was given a mindboggling account of the development about to take place on the site.

The development is the result of some research over the past few years involving Umgeni Water, AMAFA, The Natal Historical Society, The Traditional Healers Association, UKZN Department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology, and the South African Medical Association.

An elderly sangoma, who unfortunately has since departed this life, some years ago commented to a member of the Umgeni Water staff that there used to be a spring, which had healing attributes, feeding into the Umgeni River. He had been most distressed when the Umgeni River was damned at Midmar as it completely covered the spring and it was no longer accessible to him and his colleagues.

Two years ago when staff were discussing marketing possibilities for bottled water, the staff member mentioned this to his supervisor who brought it to the attention of the board of directors of Umgeni Water.

Rather than dismiss it as an old wife's tale, the board decided to investigate the matter and a post



AMAFA and Ezemvelo have agreed to allow limited advertising provided it is discreet, and no structures are erected.

graduate student from the UKZN Department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology was awarded funds to pursue biochemical and microbiological investigations into the therapeutic qualities of water obtained from the Umgeni River below Midmar.

Extensive testing involving Atomic Absorption Spectrometry, Polymerase Chain Reactions, Bacterial Susceptibility testing and LD 50 tests indicated the presence of some substance which appeared to have antibacterial properties. Unfortunately, as the output from the spring was being diluted many times by the greater amount of water from the

river itself, concentration by Reverse Osmosis and Triple Distillation were unable to produce more than 1 ficogram (1 x 10<sup>-15</sup> of a gram) of the substance which was insufficient to provide a detailed analysis.

Readers who witnessed a light plane flying low over the dam some years ago were seeing a magnetometric survey being conducted of the ground beneath the dam. The results of this survey combined with a seismographic survey, revealed the presence of a large subterranean body of water some fifty metres below the bottom of the dam wall embedded in dolerite, with a

small stream being released through a fault crack.

Using high speed boring techniques developed by the oil industry, a proto well was sunk beneath the dam wall into the underground chamber, enabling more concentrated samples of the water to be obtained.

Preliminary tests conducted to date have proved so promising that Umgeni Water has decided to enter the bottled water market with a product which will not only be purer than all other brands, but will also have therapeutic properties.

The bottled water to be named "Midmar Dry" will have definite advantages over competitive brands. Besides the medical benefits, Umgeni Water has developed a lyophilisation process (Freeze drying) which is solar powered and the product will be marketed in a dehydrated form. This will reduce shipping costs dramatically as one litre of water weighs one kilogram whereas one litre of dehydrated water weighs one thousandth of a gram. Bottles of Midmar Dry will have a calibration mark on the side and users will merely have to fill the bottle to the mark with tap water to prepare it for drinking.

Readers can expect to see advertisements exhorting passers-by to "Drink Midmar Dry!" appearing in the popular press. The launch date has been set for a year exactly to the day from today.

Senior Umgeni Municipality officials said that they felt this would give a very welcome boost to the economy in these troubled recessionary times and that encouraging the local population to drink water would reduce the road accident rate.

*Village Talk* welcomes this local business initiative and the benefits which will accrue to the local council and hopefully the local community.

