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**FLETCHER, Patrick** (1827 - 1897), South African civil engineer, geologist and surveyor, was born on the island of Jura, Scotland on 9th April 1827, the son of Patrick and Agnes nee Campbell.

He obtained formal qualifications as a civil engineer and as a geologist before arriving in South Africa in 1850. However he found opportunities in his chosen fields to be limited at the time, and he studied for and passed the examinations for admittance as a land surveyor - a calling for which, in a rapidly expanding country, there was a greater demand. Fletcher then established himself in Namaqualand, an area in the North-western Cape Colony which was experiencing a copper mining boom.

He surveyed the first 120 miles of the Orange River on behalf of the copper company and this waterway was then used to transport ore to the anchorage on the coast. His surveys extended to cover Namaqualand, and he was eventually appointed Colonial Surveyor for the region.

Fletcher however believed that road transport was the answer to the ore haulage problems, and he successfully campaigned for government funds to build a pass down the escarpment. When the project was approved he was transferred from Colonial Surveyor to Inspector of Roads and was put in charge of the survey, design and construction of the work. The major feature of the route was the Messelpad Pass, built between 1867 and 1871, and is still in use in, for all practical purposes, its original form. The construction exhibits some excellent dry-stone retaining walls and has been declared a National Monument.

Fletcher left Namaqualand in about 1875 and settled in Cape Town where he became involved in water supply schemes to the city area, having been one of the first proponents of a dam on the top of Table Mountain. He then moved to the Eastern Cape, designed the water supply for Queenstown, and was engineer-in-charge of construction of the main road to the north and the road to Port St Johns. He was thereafter appointed as Inspector of Mines for the short-lived Millwood gold field near Knysna, and was involved in the development of a coal mine at Indwe.

Fletcher married Agnes Eaglesine in 1864 and produced seven sons and two daughters.

As a pioneer engineer - probably the first formally qualified engineering geologist - in a developing country, Patrick Fletcher made a significant contribution through using his varied professional skills to good advantage.

***Major Works***

**Messelpad Pass**, Namaqualand, Cape Colony, 1867 -1871.

***Sources***

1. **Ross, Graham L.D:** The Romance of the Cape Mountain Passes. David Phillip, Cape Town , 2002.
2. **Ross, Graham L.D.** Mountain Passes, Roads & Transportation in the Cape: a Guide to Research. Published privately 2004.

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