



Fig. 3: Development of the Rehoboth Baster Population.

### Summary

This paper has presented population data of the Rehoboth Basters which span more than a century. Some of these data only vaguely reflect the true population size, but some of them are probably quite accurate. Fig. 3 summarizes all these data. In addition we have calculated the annual (exponential) growth rates for two data points: one is the estimate of the Rehoboth Baster population in 1874 (800 people) the other is the census figure for the Baster population in Southwest Africa as a whole in 1981. The result of that calculation was an annual growth rate of 3.3%. We did not use as first data point the probably very accurate figure of 333 persons for 1872 since in the following 4 years this small group had grown annually by the enormous rate of 22% – mostly due to immigration, of course.

Assuming a model population with the size of 800 people at the beginning, we can calculate a model population development that depends on nothing other than this growth rate. The black line shows this development. The beginning and the end of this curve must by definition coincide with the empirical data. But between these two points it is instructive to compare model with empirical data, be they estimates or results of enumerations. The real population could have experienced development paths quite different from the model population.

The Fig. 3 gives no obvious indication, that this has been the case. The development paths of the two populations seem rather similar. The model curve hits our midpoint estimate for the

German time (2,650 people). Since this estimate was intended to refer only to the population of the district of Rehoboth, and since we know that there was quite a number of Basters at that time living outside of the Gebiet, the estimate is either too high, or the growth rate was higher at that time. The first three South African censuses counted only "Coloureds," a category that included more than the Basters, among other groups also, e.g., Nama. It is therefore not surprising that these figures are higher than that of the model population. When the Coloured-category was redefined, the figures dropped duly below the model line, since only Coloureds of the Rehoboth District were counted. These were mostly Rehoboth Basters, as shown, but did not include those Basters who lived outside the Rehoboth District.

For the very first years of the community the picture of smooth growth is certainly wrong. The Basters did not move on their trek as one big closed group, rather they dispersed in smaller units who trekked on their own and according to their own timing – with the result that the units arrived at different times in Rehoboth. Later on, during the first decades the population development is also not compatible with smooth growth as well. We have offered evidence that the Baster community had repeatedly experienced a considerable influx of people. Yet the community did not only gain people but also lost some families who returned to the Cape Colony. The source materials used do not allow to specify the actual size of these population flows. Neither were the Rehoboth Basters a closed population in later years. In the minutes of the Baster Council for 1928–1972 (Advise-rende