



Detail of *Cape Town Panorama* by Josephus Jones (c. 1808)

INTRODUCTION

Table Mountain is hard to avoid. The iconic flat-topped, massive block of rock rises abruptly one kilometre above the sea at the southwestern tip of Africa. Only on relatively rare occasions, when completely shrouded in cloud, is Table Mountain not visible. Its enormous presence makes it difficult for those who encounter it not to wonder how it got there. It is a sight as impressive to us today as it must have been to our early ancestors who roamed the landscape in search of water and game for hundreds of thousands of years, to the first Portuguese explorers who rounded the Cape over 500 years ago and the constant stream of many others who followed. Did people fear its steep slopes and lurking wild beasts or were they drawn to it, eager to climb to the top to see what was up there and take in the view? What, if anything, did people make of the rounded lower slopes of shale and granite capped by sheer sandstone cliffs cut by deep gorges terminating in an enormous, sharp-edged flat top accentuated by the nearby pointed summit of Devil's Peak and the rounded summit of Lion's Head? This book chronicles how people interpreted and felt about mountains through the written records of those who encountered and climbed Table Mountain, and how their understanding of its origin parallels the development of geology as a science.