

Robert (Robin) Douglas Guy (1932–2008)

When Rob Guy died on 2 January 2008 he was 75 years old. He leaves his wife Bella; they had been married 52 years and had four children and six grandchildren.

Rob went to various primary schools including Merchiston, Treverton and Kilgobbin in Pietermaritzburg and the Natal Midlands during the Second World War. It was as a boy that he used to catch the train to Underberg to visit his grandfather's farm *Peakvale* and it was here that he developed his love for birds (which he had from an



Robin Guy

early age), local history and the southern Drakensberg. He finished his schooling at Hilton College, where his father had been and where in due course his sons would go.

At Rhodes University he studied Botany and Geology and on graduating he initially worked for Anglo American, prospecting, and then was a game ranger and ecologist for the then Natal Parks Board. However, once Don was born he realised that he could not support a family on £40 a month and together with his father and cousin started farming bees and sugar cane. He went on to run one of the largest apiaries in the Southern Hemisphere with over 2 000 hives spread out over most of Zululand. One of his sons said that as a little boy he was taken to so many of the farms where his father had hives that he believed that his father owned the whole of Zululand! Rob became President of the Beekeeping Association and editor of their journal.

While on their farm in Zululand Rob and Bella had four children, three boys (Don, Duncan and Robert) and a daughter (Jane). After nearly 25 years of marriage spent in Zululand they moved to Underberg where Rob made a living by growing seed potatoes, building houses and commercial properties and for a while owned a share in the Sani Top Chalet. As time went on he became more interested in the natural history and cultural history of the region. He became the most knowledgeable bird watcher in the district and for many years contributed articles to the local newspaper and when the Southern African Bird Atlas project started in 1987 he became one of its most active participants.

As he grew older Rob was more and more interested in the history of the southern Drakensberg and became an expert on the San and their art, the early Zulu people of the

region and the European settlers. When he sat his examination to be registered as a San Rock Art guide his examiner said that Rob was the best-informed person he had ever tested! He wrote a number of pamphlets on historical aspects of the district and these were printed and are still 'in print' today. These are famous for the detailed primary research which he undertook and stand apart from other local historical tracts by the quality of their research. He helped discover who killed Hodgson and even found his grave! (Talk about cold case files!)

Rob and his wife Bella had many good friends in the district and his middle years were marked by his participation in the public life of the district: he served on the Health Committee, the Wildlife Society, Lions etc. However, he became known nationally and then internationally as a bird guide taking visitors from all over the world up Sani Pass into Lesotho. He also found a number of sites in the upland grasslands and down in the mist-belt forests and mist-belt grasslands where important, rare or endangered birds could be found and where he took many visitors. It is estimated that he took many thousands of visitors bird watching and it is certain that he helped foster a local tourism industry that today attracts over 20 000 visitors a year.

This rather bland description in no way adequately describes one of the most interesting and interested people we ever knew. Rob filled his life with an energetic exploration of the physical, historical and intellectual landscape in which he found himself. He was in every aspect of his life fearless and was prepared to try his hand at many different occupations and proved that he was equal to all life's challenges. He was a gentle person, he enjoyed lively conversation and with his passing we have lost a business partner, colleague, neighbour, wise counsellor and above all a good friend. We extend our condolences to Bella, his children, grandchildren, family and all those who loved this man who lived all his life with such *joie de vivre*.

BILL SMALL and STEVEN PIPER