

**THE FOURIE HUT  
ON  
ROBBERG**

For the people who have had the privilege of staying in the Fourie Hut on Robberg

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## **FOREWORD**

The Fourie Hut on Robberg has also been affectionately known as “The Barnacle” or “The Palace” owing to its prominence – compared to the Thesen Hut being known as “The Pimple”. In the narrative, I refer to the Fourie Hut simply as “The Hut”.

The majority of the narrative was penned by my father, Bob Fourie, as part of a biography of his father, Dr Louis Fourie, MBE, MBChB (Edin.), DPH (Lon.). I have chosen to extract the narrative as written, and as such references in the first person refer to Bob.

Andrew Fourie  
Plettenberg Bay  
June 2010

## INTRODUCTION

It was in 1936 that the question of our annual holiday arose. We tried to do everything together but had not had a good holiday since our South West days. My father, Dr Louis Fourie, remembered that in his extreme youth farmers used to trek with their ox wagons from the Little Karoo to Plettenberg Bay. Managing to get our leaves to coincide we set off for Plettenberg Bay. In 1936 the tar road ended at Vereeniging and with the possible exception of Bloemfontein was not seen again until you returned to Vereeniging. There was invariably a lot of drama getting away. My father was no help, as, up to the last moment he was completing his annual report. He was given the job of keeping an eye on the dog when we started packing the car at 4 am. Jumbo would have reasons to visit his friends the day before we left, so he wasn't a great help. So the burden fell on mother and me. When at last the car was packed and we were ready to go, Jock was missing. This required much whistling and searching in the sanitary lanes at 4.30 am before we found him. He was given a smart cuff and hurled into the back of the car where he proceeded to sneeze his head off. He was ignored and in fact no one was on speaking terms until we got off the tar. Then my father would risk a tentative remark on the state of the countryside. And we were all friends and on holiday. It was a long drive, 750 miles (1200 km) on dirt roads, heavily corrugated in sections, with gates every few miles. Every now and then my father would shout "Stop!" which would wake those who were dozing. He had spotted a gerbil colony and would get out to examine it and its state of health. We would sleep along the road and having crossed the Prince Alfred's Pass, which is little better today, 1985, than it was then, we proceeded to Mr van Rooyen's farm at Robberg. Here there was little or no organisation and we were told to set up our camp in amongst some trees. We shared a spring with cattle, goats, and pigs and there were no sanitary facilities; you took the spade and wandered off into the fynbos. We had hardly set up our tents when two puff adders appeared on the scene. My father became very active and despatched both with the spade. All in all it was not an auspicious beginning to the holiday.



**Louis Fourie Esq.**  
**MBE, MBChB (Edin.), DPH (Lon.)**

But the fishing was excellent. On the advice of the farmer we engaged a 'ghillie', Cornelius Plaatjies who lived on the farm, at 2/6d per day. He got the bait, showed us where and how to fish and made our fishing trips. We were lucky to have good runs of elf and leervis with an occasional musselcracker. We were never short of fish.

After some ten days we decided to go to Knysna to pay courtesy calls on old friends of the family. We decided that Cornelius should look after our camp as there was quite a traffic of young coloureds, and also to keep the animals out. Jock would be left in camp, and, in order that he and Cornelius should be friendly, Cornelius was told to throw Jock's tennis ball for him. This he did and they got on famously. To keep Cornelius busy we gave him an Indian cane on which to bind rings, and various other jobs such as making up traces and scouring pots and pans.

We had a pleasant day in Knysna and returning to camp were to find Cornelius sitting some distance out of camp and a very alert Jock sitting in one of the folding chairs. Cornelius informed us that once we were out of sight, Jock drove him out of the camp and wouldn't let him back. Needless to say there was no working on rods or scouring of pans. Jock was his mother's son without a doubt.

Amongst the friends we had visited were the Thesens. And from them we found out how they had managed to build a rondavel on Robberg.

Mr Charlie Thesen on hearing that his old friend Dr Fourie was camping amongst the pigs and goats insisted that we move into the Thesen hut. The hut, known as the 'Pimple' was badly in need of repair but was nevertheless an improvement on our camping site. The few weeks we spent in it were to resolve us to build a hut of our own.

We took our annual leave in January. For reasons I cannot remember my father was unable to accompany us. So my mother, Jumbo and I journeyed down in my car. And through courtesy of the Thesen family we were able to have the use of their hut on Robberg, commonly known as the 'Pimple'. It was a pleasant holiday with good fishing under the guidance of Cornelius Plaatjies. But of more importance, we set in motion the procedure for building our hut. And my mother chose the site.

My father applied to the Department of Lands for permission to rent a spot and build a hut on Robberg and his application was dealt with by an old friend, Major Edwards, who had been head of the Public Works Department in Windhoek. Permission was given through the Provincial Representative, Department of Lands, Cape Town. An agreement of lease was entered into in May 1938 the principal clauses of which were as follows:-

1. The permission shall be for a period of one year reckoned from the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1938 and shall continue thereafter until terminated by one month's notice in writing given either by the Department of Lands or the Permission holder.
2. That the permission shall be subject to an annual fee of £1.
3. The site or any structure thereon shall not be sub-let.
4. The permission shall convey no claim to a grant of land or to compensation for improvements effected thereon. In the event of the permission being terminated, the Permission holder shall be bound to remove, before the expiration of the permission, the materials of any structures erected by him, but shall be bound to leave no holes or obstructions whatsoever on the land.
5. Any existing rights of the public to the land held under this permission shall not be interfered with.

In 1943 the lease was transferred to the Divisional Council, Knysna to whom Robberg was granted as a Nature Reserve. In 1946 a new Lease Agreement was signed in which the rental was increased to £6 per annum and clause 4 altered to allow the Divisional Council to purchase any improvements at a valuation to be agreed upon by the parties. In the event of no agreement being reached the Permission Holder shall be bound to remove materials of any structures etc. etc.



### **Construction in Progress**

One might wonder how under such tenuous terms anyone would build a substantial structure. But as Mr Snooke, the Provincial Representative, Department of Lands wrote in 1938 - "I do not think you need have any fear of the Permission being withdrawn at an early date as, unless something serious happens in connection with them, they run on for many years. In the case of Mr Thesen he has had the lease of his site since 1924". How right he was!

During our holiday we also improved the path over the top of Robberg to the point. This entailed hacking our way through bushes at the top, something which would be frowned upon today.

We contacted a stone mason who agreed to organise the necessary labour and to start building the hut when we arrived in December. He was a Coloured man named W Cairncross and proved most reliable.

I managed to get my leave in December 1938 and all our plans were made to coincide with this. We had purchased for £75, from Leon Motors, the purveyors of Packard cars, a well used International Truck, which had belonged to Morkels, the furniture removers. This we loaded down to the Plimsoll mark with an assortment of tools and sundry furniture for the ultimate hut. And we tied a great big sail over the lot. And Jumbo and I set forth one Friday morning into a chapter of crises.

We got to within 20 miles of Kroonstad when we were stopped by an overheated engine. And then we made a major error. There was plenty of water at the roadside so we scooped some up and put it into the radiator - and cracked the cylinder head. I forget how we found a telephone. We phoned Leons and told our sad tale. They said "Don't worry, get a tow in to Kroonstad and find a place where we can work and meet us at such a place at such a time". We found an obliging man who let us use his garage.

A couple of mechanics arrived after dark with a complete cylinder block and installed it. They then soldered the radiator which had been at the root of our troubles. They were on their way home by midnight. And Leon Motors refused to charge us one penny for the whole operation.

The next morning we were within a few miles of the next town, Ventersburg when we realised we were out of water again. We struggled into a garage.

But Saturday morning in a Free State dorp is impossible, for every farmer from miles around comes in wanting attention. The proprietor was only too happy to let me use his oxyacetylene torch, to once more solder the radiator as I had seen Leon's man do the previous night. We removed some of the valve springs from the replaced cylinder block and used them to cushion the shock of the roads on the radiator with great success. We pressed on without further crises, crossed over the Prince Alfred Pass, and drew up next to the Pimple. There was a loud 'clunk'. The connecting rod of the steering mechanism had fallen off.



**The Construction Crew on the roof**

Our first job was to build a road up to the hut site and then to collect all the necessary material. The rocks were collected on site, the sand from the adjoining farm, the water from the Piesang River and the timber, cement etc. from Thesen & Co in Knysna.

Willie Cairncross true to his word produced good stonemasons and willing helpers or 'handlangers'. There were Windvoels, Donkermans, Wildemans and other representatives of the Plettenberg Bay Coloured community. Jumbo was going through a phase of body building and led the transport team. The members vied with each other in picking up building stones or other heavy articles and speed was the essence of the operation. Jumbo shovelled sand with them and humped cement bags. They were a cheerful, noisy crew, yelling at all and sundry as they sped on their way on the 'International'. Jumbo then and later became well known and liked by the Coloured community.

I was the Clerk of Works or general foreman. My parents arrived by car shortly after we did, and, through the courtesy of the Thesen family, we stayed in the Pimple while our hut was built.



**The Island**

By the end of December when I was due to report back to the mine, the hut walls were up to roof height. During January the hut was completed, when a character by the name of Stephanus van Rooyen nailed on the flat iron roof. Since Stephanus put on the roof it has had to be replaced twice.

An examination of the invoices would indicate that purchases from Thesen & Co were £95. Sundry purchases would probably have accounted for £50 while labour would have cost not more than £100. Jumbo started for home with the truck but it broke down near Willowmore. He sold it to Studer's Garage for £35. Thus including the truck the hut cost us a sum of the order of £300.

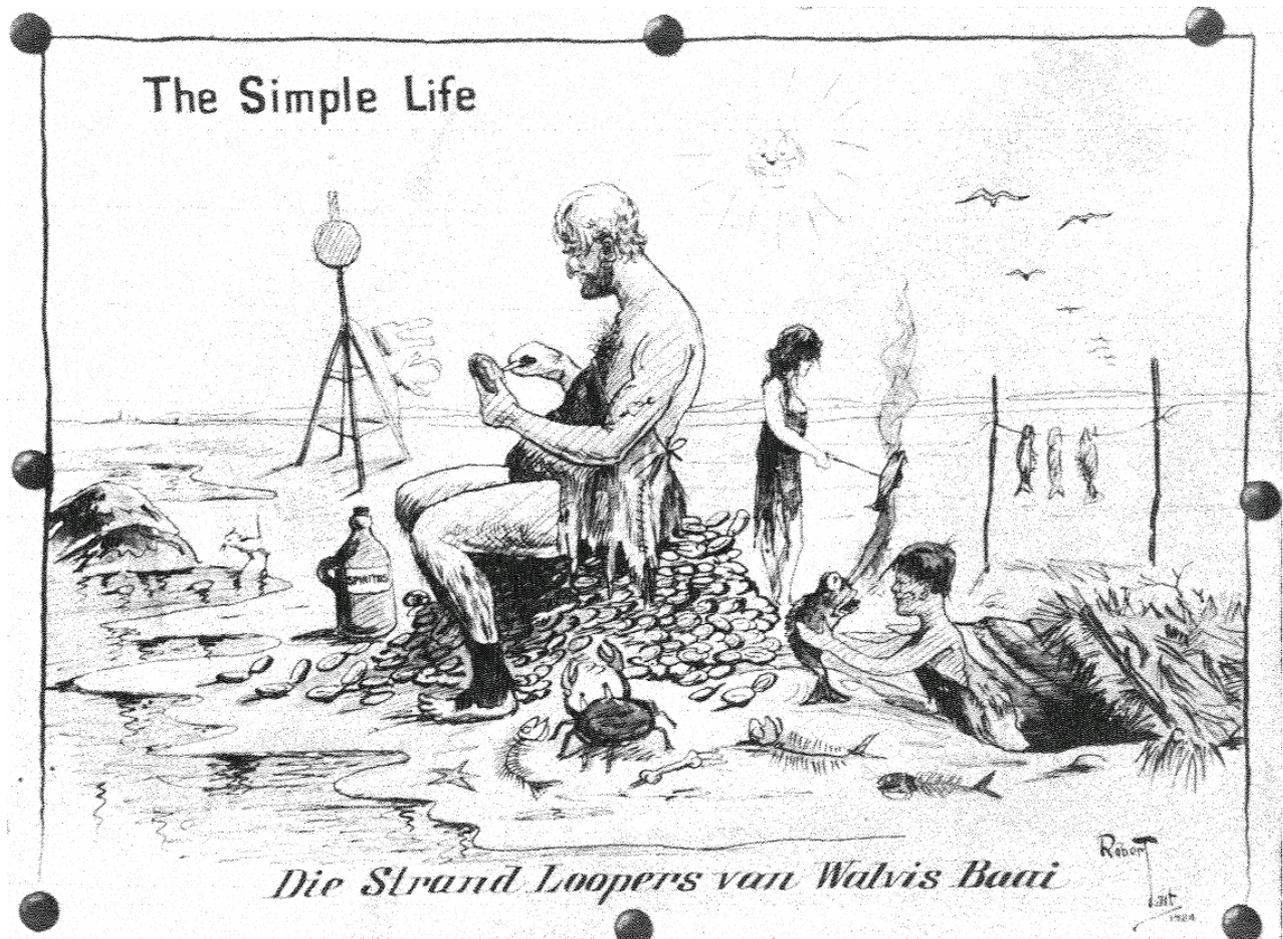
My father's friend, Mr Harry Drew, never one to miss an opportunity, wrote to him on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1939, using his nickname of 'Selous', as follows:

*My dear Selous*

*My conscience has been pricking me lately and, unlike yourself, I am unable to sleep, eat or drink unless I supply the necessary sedative. My wife has been reading me a letter she received from Mrs Stone who met you at Plettenberg Bay and who says that you are building a house on top of the world. She also said that Mrs Selous had had to have all her teeth out and was not feeling up to the mark. When my wife read this I felt that I owed you a reply to your letter received at Christmas time and that writing to you was the palliative my conscience required. Now, your damned conscience is so bally elastic that a trifle of this sort would not affect it in the slightest degree so perhaps you cannot quite appreciate my reason for writing. But, writing about consciences, have you no pangs of conscience at the idea of treating Mrs Selous like a baboon? Why build up amongst the stones and rocks upon a windswept coast? After all, Mrs Selous is a member of an ancient race to whom the arts were known when the Fouries still searched for scorpions under stones and addressed each other in an incoherent jargon - though I must admit that the present generation of her race now only seem to understand the art of bomb-slinging. They tell me you are not being kind to her and that you are making her sing at concerts, and, as my Frau knows, this is the hardest thing to do when you have lost your teeth. But tell me Selous, are you seriously thinking of retiring to Robberg and eking out an existence as a Strandloper? Why don't you come nearer to civilisation down these parts? I think Tait must have had prophetic vision when he depicted you, as he did, eating mussels*

*whilst Mrs Selous did the work. How do you like retired life? I found the first six months the most trying and now I like it. I am getting on slowly but surely and owing to my having been one might almost say a total abstainer, my doctor has allowed me two whiskeys a day. Had I not led such a temperate life I should in all probability have had to exist on water as a beverage - so take warning.*

Robert Tait had been commissioned by Harry Drew back in 1924 to depict the peculiar holiday practices of the Fouries, when 'Selous' chose to spend his annual leave in December with the Fourie family camping on the beach 5km south of Swakopmund.



My parents continued to rent 19 Doveton Road as it was convenient for Jumbo at University and served as a useful base for such consultant work as came my father's way. I recall he undertook other work such as advising Fotheringham, the Baker, on anti-plague measures on his farm at Heilbron, OFS

## WAR

Initially, when war was declared, life went on in roughly the same way. We were far from the action and there was no rationing or restriction on the use of petrol. The family went to our hut on Robberg at the year end, and, as I was unable to get leave, I was unable to accompany them. This visit to Robberg was to have sad consequences for us. We lost one of our best loved friends. Jock contracted biliary, and, do what they could, they were unable to save him. Game to the last he well and truly bit Fyfe, the Knysna Chemist, who tried to take a rectal temperature. He died with a wag of his stumpy little tail and is buried under a big rock in front of the hut. He was the best dog we ever had. I wept when I received the telegram reporting his death.

Jumbo passed his first year medical course without difficulty and in 1940 went on to medical school where he proceeded to do very well.

There was a rush to join the armed services, and in the rush were my father and Jumbo. I do not know who was the first to attest. In Jumbo's correspondence is the following letter addressed to him:

*Dear Sir, 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1940*

*I have your letter of 10<sup>th</sup> June, and note you have left the University to go on active service and will therefore not be returning to the University in the second term.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*A deV Herholdt*

*Acting Registrar*

On 16<sup>th</sup> August 1941 Jumbo was transferred from No. 3 Air School Wonderboom to No. 23 Air School, Waterkloof with above average assessment of ability and 55 hrs 45 mins flying time to his credit.

He qualified for his SAAF Flying Badge on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1941 and was transferred to No. 61 Air School, George in January 1942 with above average assessment in Instrument Flying. He qualified as First Pilot on Avro Anson Aircraft on 27<sup>th</sup> January, and as First Pilot (Night) on June 9<sup>th</sup> with a grand total of 416 flying hours to his credit.

He loved flying and proved a natural and capable pilot. According to his Pilots Flying Log Book all his assessments were above average. He was somewhat annoyed when he was selected to fly twin engined Ansons at the Navigation School at George. His job was to fly trainee navigator's and I assume know where he was at the same time. But being stationed at George he came to idolise the hut and spent every spare moment there. He flew over Robberg regularly and took many aerial photographs. He was to become well known in Knysna and won for himself a particular niche in the affections of the Thesen family. Old Mr Charlie Thesen while beginning to lose his memory could always remember Jumbo and loved to have him to stay.

But all was not well at the George air station. It was run by the Royal Air Force and there appeared to be some rivalry and even hostility between the South Africans and the RAF personnel and it was not a very happy station. The CO was fond of saying that South Africans were fair weather flyers and lost no opportunity of putting them up in bad weather. Until the construction of the modern George airport with its navigational aids George was avoided in bad weather by SA Airways. The Outeniqua mountains stood menacingly behind the aerodrome. On occasion after they had taken off, heavy cloud or mist would come down blanketing out the whole area and the returning aircraft would be directed over the mountains to Oudtshoorn. On several occasions Jumbo protested but his protests were disregarded.

There was a side to Jumbo's character. He was slow to dislike, but when he did, he made no effort to conceal his dislike and could be very outspoken. This did not improve the relationship between him and his CO. There were incidents unrelated to flying which were magnified out of proportion. Yet, with his marked dislikes he had an endearing characteristic. A conciliatory gesture could lead to a ready forgiveness. But from letters written, this animosity was never resolved. In these letters he reported fatal accidents to crews which disturbed him very much. I was to meet several of his airman friends who knew him well at this stage and were unanimous in praise for the stand he took under the circumstances. They related also occasions when his skill saved his life and those of his trainee crews.

His log book notes that he was to fly as far afield as Durban and Cape Town and to make many trips to Port Elizabeth and Port Alfred.



**Andrew McCammon  
'Jumbo' Fourie**

I arrived in England on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1942, my birthday, and the coldest day in 20 years. For the next eight months I was to be under instruction, firstly to become a commissioned officer and secondly, to qualify as a Torpedo gunner, the first of a new rank specially designed to cater for the torpedo requirements of motor torpedo boats. There were short leaves to Northern Ireland where I renewed old relationships. As far as my newly acquired trade was concerned there were appointments in Great Britain and in the Eastern Mediterranean. I chose the Eastern Mediterranean as I would pass through South Africa to get there.

I set sail from Liverpool in the liner Orcades on 26<sup>th</sup> August and, after calling in at Freetown, we docked at Durban early on the morning of 29<sup>th</sup> September. As soon as I could, I got ashore and was very pleased to learn that my father-in-law was present. I sought him out and while in his office he phoned Johannesburg. We would hear later whether my wife would be able to get on a train and join me.

I was present when the call came through. He replaced the receiver and said "She has caught the train - but I have bad news for you Bob - Jumbo was killed last night in a flying accident - his plane flew into a mountain at George".

In spite of repeated requests, our family were never given details arising from the inquiry which inevitably takes place, nor were we to receive a message of condolence from the Commanding Officer or any other person in authority at the station. This distressed my father very much. All we ever learnt was that Jumbo and four companions crashed at George

trying to locate the aerodrome. A young Hollander, Lieutenant van Heezik was thrown clear of the plane and gallantly tried to rescue his companions from the burning plane - but in vain. He died a few days later from the burns he sustained and my father and Dr Daubenton attended his funeral in Johannesburg. The last entry in Jumbo's logbook was "Crashed in fog 28.9.42". It recorded that he had a Grand Total All Service Flying of 628 hours 30 minutes.

The denial of information of the finding of the inquiry would suggest as if there were some undesirable features of neglect. In a period of six weeks some 17 lads lost their lives in flying accidents at training establishments. These accidents became the subject of a forceful leader in the Natal Witness on October 8<sup>th</sup> 1942.

Of the many letters of condolence I copy this one from someone he dearly loved.

*Dear Mrs Fourie,*

*Words and letters are so inadequate at a time like this, but I do just want to offer you my sincerest sympathy. Jumbo was such a good dear person and the way he spoke of you and his father and Bob made me realise what a happy family you were and what a lovely life he had lived. There is such a lot I would like to say - only wish I could talk to you, as it would make things much easier.*

*I saw Jumbo just a week before the accident - they had flown up here on some business flight. He was his usual cheerful, loveable self, and as we walked along the beach, we talked about Knysna and Robberg, and of the happy times we had spent there. He said that he was very happy and that he just loved flying. He was extremely interested in aeroplanes and one of his fellow pilots told me that he was well liked by the pupils because he took such a keen interest in their progress.*

*I went down to Knysna for the week-end - Jumbo's loss is deeply felt there.*

*I think Jumbo's most endearing characteristic was his sincerity. I feel that it will be a long time before I find such a true, good, dear friend as I found in him. He was so kind and thoughtful too. Whenever he came up to PE he used to come and see me and tell me all the Knysna news. He was such a joyful person, full of jokes and good humour. Please forgive me for writing to you like this - but I'm sure you'll understand how I feel. You know what a good son he was and I shall always be grateful that I was given the privilege of knowing him even though his going has left such a blank.*

*However, all the brave young men realised the enormity of the sacrifice they might be called upon to make, so it falls to us not to mar the generosity of their sacrifice by begrudging it, as it were, and I know that Jumbo would be most unhappy if he knew that his going had caused you too much misery. I shall always think of him as the happy person I knew so well and I shall always remember him in my prayers. I feel I should not have written such a long letter. Please forgive me but I wanted to sympathise with you in the loss of your son who was also my dearly loved friend.*

*With love from D*

This beautiful letter was to move my father greatly and to give him comfort. The writer was to lose her brother in the fighting in North Africa.

Such was war. We had joined so many of our friends whose sons had paid the extreme penalty.

My father wrote to me as follows:

*"The vacancy in our lives by Jumbo's death can never be filled but we find consolation in the thought that he has joined the band of friends and other young men to whom the sacrifice of their lives in a noble cause meant more than life itself and who must surely have found the reward of eternal happiness beyond the grave".*

It was at this time that my father received the following letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1944:

*Dear Dr. Fourie,*

*With your and Mrs Fourie's permission we brothers would like to put up a small Bronze Plate down at Robberg - about 8 x 12 - in memory of your son Jumbo, and worded somewhat as hereunder:*

*HE LOVED THIS AREA*

*LIEUT. ANDREW (JUMBO) FOURIE. SAAF*

*\_\_\_\_\_ 1942 (?)*

*We thought the best spot would be either down on the rocks at the Gap or on some rock on the path leading down to the Gap.*

*If you are in agreement would you give us his Christian names and also the date of the accident at George; and if you see fit please alter the suggested wording of the Memorial.*

*Further you are probably aware that down in our establishment at the Mill there is an Aeroplane Propeller with an Electric Clock set into the Boss. While this is not inconveniencing us in any way is there anything you would like done with it?*

*Kind regards. Yours sincerely.*

*HH Thesen*

My father replied thanking the brothers most sincerely for thinking of such a beautiful tribute to Jumbo and suggesting that had he been given any choice in the matter, he would have preferred this to any other memorial.

**ANDREW McCAMMON FOURIE (JUMBO) LIEUT. SAAF**

**28.9.1942**

**HE LOVED ROBBERG**

The above, inscribed on a bronze plate, secured to the rock face at the gap on Robberg invariably inspires the majority of people who gaze on it. Few do more than acclaim and pass on.

A tribute which I value was left for me at the offices of the Angling Club when I was chairman. It was a poem written by the Viscountess Sidmouth, formerly the Honourable Barbara Addington before her husband succeeded to the title. We were to meet later.

### **He loved Robberg**

Is this your 'pass' to immortality -  
To leave the Styx and wander evermore  
On virgin sands that you can print no more,  
Or by dark pools where fishes never see  
The sun glint on the red anaenome?

As you above the rocks where eagles soar,  
Or skating with the fledglings on the shore,  
Or riding spume blown backwards from the sea?

And will it end when the last eagle dies?  
Or is the One who will not have it so -  
Who shaped the cliffs, the ocean and the skies  
And all the strong and little lives below,  
And will not leave in the forgotten shade  
One so loved the beauty He had made.

## **IN RESIDENCE**

According to my father's military papers he assumed duty on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1940. Too old to be sent North he was promoted Major and sent eventually as Acting Director of Medical Services to the South West African Command. He was released from service on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1944.

My parents improved the hut by the addition of a garage, so arranged as to fit in to the permitted 50ft x 50ft of the permit. They had also imported some soil and planted grass into which stepping stones were let. The morning shower under the watering can was systematically arranged so that the grassed area was watered in turn.

My father, I imagine within minutes of taking up residence, was observing all aspects of nature around him. He was to observe tunney in the bay long before the first tunney was caught, and to note the annual visit of the Southern Right Whales. He also noted the damage to vegetation on Robberg by cattle and goats. He was always much in demand by visiting fishermen to advise on fishing 'spots'. He became a fund of information.

On 18<sup>th</sup> December 1944 he received a letter from the Secretary of the Knysna Divisional Council as follows:

*Dear Sir*

*Robberg Nature Reserve*

*At my Council's meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1944, it was resolved to establish an Advisory Board in terms of Section 4 of the Nature Reserves Ordinance No 18 of 1939, to advise the Council on matters relating to the Robberg Nature Reserve.*

*The constitution of the proposed Board was agreed upon as follows:*

*The Chairman and two members of this Council, together with yourself and one representative each from the Department of Forestry and Agriculture and the Village Management Board of Plettenberg Bay.*

*I was instructed to ask you, as I do herewith, whether you will be prepared to serve on the proposed Advisory Board and whether you will kindly accept the honorary wardenship of the reserve. In this latter respect, I may mention that the Chairman, Mr Metelerkamp, is very anxious to have the benefit of your knowledge and advice and the Council will, therefore, be very grateful for your favourable consideration of its requests; it was the unanimous feeling of the meeting that no more suitable person could be found to serve as warden, as you live in the reserve and are interested in it. Kindly advise me of your decision in due course.*

*Yours faithfully.*

*WAH Bester. Secretary.*

He accepted, but regulations relating to the Constitution of the Advisory Board were not gazetted until the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1945.

He was to throw himself wholeheartedly into the work. The first meeting of the Advisory Board was not held until 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1946. But during 1945 notice boards were prepared and erected and signboards located at different points in the reserve indicating paths to fishing spots. On the top of the 'berg' he used large stones to mark the path and was later most annoyed to find that persons had deliberately moved them. He had to laugh at himself when on studying the spoor he realised that the persons were members of a troop of baboons who turned the stones over looking for scorpions, a baboon delicacy.

On another occasion Cornelius Plaatjies asked him if he was not afraid of snakes. When he asked why, Cornelius said he had just stepped over a very poisonous berg adder in the path. His powers of observation appeared to be waning.

Most important, a fence and grid was erected to keep cattle and goats out of the reserve. Erosion of certain sections of the main paths was attended to. The shooting of buck was stopped.

As the work progressed on Robberg the Advisory Board held its quarterly meetings at the Fourie hut and members were conducted on inspections in loco. My father was to initiate all improvements to the reserve.

In 1947 it became known that a lighthouse was to be erected at the Point. Two young men arrived one day at the hut and requested to see over it. When asked who they were and why they wanted to see over the hut, they replied that they were from the railways administration and were considering taking over the hut as quarters for the lighthouse keeper of the lighthouse to be built at the Point. My father told them in no uncertain manner, that the railways administration had sufficient money to build their own lighthouse keeper's house, and, they would get his hut over his dead body. He asked them how they were going to construct the lighthouse, and they replied that they would have a road made to the site. On being told they had never been to the point he offered to take them there. Over two hours later he returned with them in a state of exhaustion.

In spite of the limited accommodation my parents were to have close friends to stay with them. William Reisle spent a most successful two weeks fishing holiday in which he caught several large musselcracker. Colonel Venning spent a week, and, in the course of conversation my father related the visit of the young men from the railways, in no way indicating that he wanted any further action. He misjudged his old friend, the Colonel, who on return to Cape Town bearded the General Manager of Railways himself, and, imagine my father's surprise when a high placed railway's officer came to apologise for the behaviour of the young engineers.

The materials for the lighthouse were transported across the gap at Robberg on a ropeway and carried by labourers to the site. The lighthouse was to be unattended, the light medium being gas. Today the gas bottles are renewed once annually by helicopter. It must have been an arduous task before the service of a helicopter was available.

As a result of the many and constant enquiries my father was receiving from visiting fishermen and aspirant fisherman he decided that there was a need for an angling club. He discussed the idea with several of his friends and on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1947 the inaugural meeting of the Plettenberg Bay Piscatorial Association was to be held at the old Beacon Island Hotel. A committee, with Dr Fourie as Chairman, Mr H Newdigate as honorary Secretary, and Mr JL Price-Jones as honorary Treasurer was elected. The name of the body was subsequently changed to Plettenberg Bay Angling Club. From a foundation membership of 45, the membership now is over 900. It is doubtful however if the Club caters for the needs originally envisaged.



**“Mickie”**

was coming. A shift in the wind brought the propeller round to cut her deeply above the left eye, the skin and severed flesh falling over the eye. She replaced the fallen flesh, wrapped a towel round her head and blew SOS on the bugle. My father rushed her into the village to Dr Heyns, an Edinburgh contemporary. He was horrified when ‘Bokkie’ Heyns stitched her up with an unsterilised needle and gut and without the benefit of a local anaesthetic. She never turned a hair, healed without complications and claimed that the accident had cured her high blood pressure.

The house was designed by our friend of Doveton Road, Mr Spicer, and I prepared the working drawings and made many mistakes and ended up in my father’s bad books. There were post war building restrictions which limited residences to a certain square footage. But strangely, there appeared to be no restrictions on detached garage and outhouses, so while we economised in the one, we indulged ourselves in the other. We sited the garage so that it could be joined to the house at a later date and provide a further room in the process. And this was done later.

Mr Stanley Stewart, a well known and reputable local builder commenced building on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1948 and finished at the end of May. There were shortages of materials and I would receive urgent telegrams to try to obtain certain articles on the Rand. By now I had been transferred to Grootvlei Proprietary Mines and was able, with the consent of the General Manager, to buy used galvanised pipes. Cement was in short supply and could only be obtained by permit and in small quantities. I recall the anger in the district when it was learnt that Mr Claude Sturrock, then Minister of Railways, had built himself a large concrete jetty for his small pleasure boat at his holiday residence on the Knysna river.



**Hilgard "Bob" Fourie**



**Mary Fourie**

## **THE DIARIES**

There is no specific record of occupation in the hut between 1948 and 1960, although we have 16mm films showing that the Fourie family stayed there during holidays.

We had a devoted clientele for our Robberg hut. It was seldom empty during the holiday season. The terms of our occupying the site prohibited our leasing the hut, not that we wanted to. The obvious pleasure it conferred on our friends was reward enough. We used it regularly for picnics and braais.

Their stays are all recorded in a visitors' diary we installed when we first made the hut available for friends in 1960. The majority of the accounts are lyrical in description of their stay.

*(The diaries have been collated into a separate document - The Fourie Hut Robberg Diaries).*

In June 1971 I replaced the hut roof for the second time. Instead of flat iron I now used flat asbestos sheeting and was assisted by a builder, Benny Botha, who lent me some of his artisans. Through weather delays the operation took approximately 3 weeks.

## HANDOVER OF THE HUT

The control of the Robberg Nature Reserve was transferred from the Divisional Council of Knysna to the Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation of the Cape on 1st April 1980 and the Thesen family and I were told that the Department would be taking over our huts once the transfer had been registered.

At the same time the Department had taken over the control of the Keurbooms river above the road bridge and the Angling Club had been notified that waterskiing would no longer be permitted on the river. This resulted in a howl of rage from various members including Ken Redfern and Bob Reddering. The Club committee and Redfern decided to request a meeting with the Director of the Department of Nature and Environmental conservation. Toby Moll and I flew to Cape Town on behalf of the Angling Club and on 28th January were joined by Ken Redfern at the Verwoerd building and were ushered into the office of Morsbach, the Director. Mr Morsbach was a pleasant friendly person but before long I got the impression that he lacked decision and was out to be all things to all people. Not so his deputy, Dr Neethling who soon revealed himself to be an arrogant state official to whom I took an instant dislike. Our argument was that both banks of the river were solid rock lined over the distance used by skiers and little harm in the nature of erosion could be done during the holiday season by speeding boats towing skiers. Ken Redfern added that boats at speed created less wash than at 10 knots. Dr Neethling drew an analogy of the damage done on the slopes of Table mountain by youngsters on their 'scrambler' motor bikes and I responded by saying it was a poor comparison. This annoyed the Doctor and we exchanged further disagreements which were ended when Mr Morsbach said he would visit the river. I managed to get in a word with him, that when he came, the Thesens and I would like to discuss the matter of our huts on Robberg.

It was not until 17th May that Mr Morsbach visited and was taken up the river. And it was not until 18th November that he visited Robberg when we gave him tea at the hut and he went on to see the Angling Club huts at the point and fountain. There was no meaningful discussion about the huts.

From these visits it was agreed that water skiing could take place over a section of the river between certain hours. And the Thesens and I bided our time. Strange to relate the Department did not take control of the river below the bridge with the lagoon and sandspit where seagulls nested. This area came under sea fisheries and nothing was done about skiing on the lagoon much to the annoyance of boat fishermen. At a later stage this area was handed over to Nature Conservation.

In 1984 thieves had broken through the roof of the garage of the hut and in the process done a lot of damage and achieved nothing for there was nothing of interest or value in the garage. I got a contractor to put on a new roof.

On 17th May 1985 a Mr Watts arrived to value our hut on Robberg and he was followed by a Mr van der Vyver on 4th June to do the same. I gave them a free hand.

On 13th February 1986 I received a letter from the Provincial authorities enclosing a cheque for R27 000 and telling me to vacate the hut by 28th February. However I phoned Dr Neethling of Cape Nature Conservation and postponed the departure until 1st April in order to enable me to remove furniture and odds and ends. I proceeded to remove the furniture and what I did not want I gave to Gert Oliphant, faithful servant of the Angling Club who produced a lorry on 22nd March and carted away what I had given him and the last of the rubbish. The primus range, now nearly 50 years old and in working order I gave to the Africana Museum. I handed over the keys of the hut on 1st April to Paul Bothma of Cape Nature Conservation and have only been back to the hut once for a short TV interview about which more later. We had a final party at the hut attended by the Vloks, Naudes, McNamaras, Glasspools, Doaty Chaplin, and Kate Fewell.

We had built the hut in December 1938 and January 1939 and had thus owned it for 48 years. My brother Jumbo had worshipped it and made good use of it while stationed in George in the

SAAF until his death in a flying accident. My parents had lived in it from 1944 to 1948. And we had given great pleasure to a great number of our friends for their holidays.

I accepted the R27 000 with a sense of guilt for money could not compensate me for the loss of a shrine. The Thesen family returned whatever they were granted for the Pimple. They maintained that by the time they had distributed proportionally to each entitled, the share would be the price of a little more than a matchbox.

## **EPILOGUE**

*(by Andrew)*

For some years Cape Nature Conservation made use of the huts, the Thesen hut being used for the gate officials, the Fourie hut being used alternately by researchers and for a while by the local conservation officer, Henk Niewoudt.

An external toilet, shower and donkey boiler were added. The road was cemented. A PVC pipe and electrical cable were run from a source of supply at the Robberg entrance.

Bob Fourie suffered from a stroke on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1997 that left him partially paralysed. He gradually recovered some mobility, and resisted going to a retirement home, in spite of having to go downstairs for his shower at their house "Mellyrie". This was in part a reluctance to leave his dear dog Rosie, who was not allowed to join him at FGV. This was resolved when his close friends Peter and Dot Fewell 'adopted' Rosie.

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1998 Mary and Bob moved to FGV. Bob's health and mobility were stable for a while but in the latter part of 1999 started to deteriorate. In June he moved for frail care to the Riley Wing of FGV. He occasionally spent time back in the cottage with Mary. Bob passed away on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000 in the Riley Wing, with James at his side.

Cape Nature attempted to maintain the Hut with a lick of paint and occasional repairs. But it needed the tender care that Dad had given it over the years. The elements and lack of care led to windows and shutters being broken, the roof lifting and the floor rotting.

In May 2003 the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board (WCNCB) launched an 'Eco-Tourism' initiative by inviting Bidders (Investors and Investment Facilitators) to submit bids for Public Private Partnership concessions for the building and operation of eco-tourism facilities at development sites within 7 nature reserves, including Robberg.

The stated objectives with this form of commercialisation included:

1. To contribute to realising the full income generating potential from eco-tourism opportunities of the nature reserves and other areas under the Board's management.
2. To generate demonstrable economic development particularly black economic empowerment (BEE), in the local economies of the areas where the Board operates as a result of its tourism and management activities.
3. To ensure wherever possible that reserve planning and operations, particularly the new and expanded tourism developments, enjoy broad-based support especially in the local communities where they occur.
4. To create attractive tourism investment opportunities in assets managed by WCNCB, and to ensure that the capital required for these new commercial ventures is raised from the private rather than the public sector.
5. To ensure that within the portfolio of assets managed by the WCNCB, there are facilities available that cater for all economic groupings or market segments within the society.
6. To ensure affordable access in the future to facilities similar to those currently being enjoyed by the public.
7. To diversify the range of products offered within the WCNCB areas.

8. To improve the efficiency with which the current assets (especially tourism) are managed to ensure more effective achievement of the Board's biodiversity conservation and environmental education goals.

This translated into the following 'Identified Opportunity' as drafted by WCNCB:

*The Robberg huts present the opportunity for an exclusive usage, in an unparalleled location with a magnificent sense of place. The huts are easily accessible and have good infrastructure. The development will be restricted to the two stone huts, and no new structures will be allowed. No permanent structures would be permitted beyond the existing walls and roof of these two buildings. The two fisherman huts are not part of the package but if refurbished could be included. However public access would be required. The outer structure must be retained but the opportunity is to re-develop and re-furbish the interior of the huts (subject to the EIA process).*

*The huts will be allocated as separate development opportunities.*

*The following option will be considered:*

*Corporate Entertainment Facility:*

*The two huts can be restored into two exclusive corporate facilities. Naming rights are possible and can be negotiated. The lease will be for a period of 3-5 years depending on total value added to WCNCB.*

*The site is unique and strict development parameters will apply. No development shall take place outside of the existing footprint of the earmarked huts, and will be subject to an EIA and SAHRA approval.*

*The current day visitor facilities and access to the public will remain.*

There followed a sequence of interchange between WCNCB and Interested and Affected Parties, with strong objections coming through Elbie Burger of the Plettenberg Bay Community Environment Forum.

In October 2004, I contacted Elbie, and submitted a letter of objection on behalf of the family, including:

*Our hope when we reluctantly relinquished the hut was that it would be made available and be accessible to the average citizen, and not be made into an exclusive paradise of the rich. My father had allowed a considerable number of our family friends to also use the hut without any charge, and while we realise that it is necessary for WCNCB to recoup the costs of maintaining the building, we had hoped it would be possible to operate the hut in similar fashion to other nature reserve accommodation.*

*We had also hoped that the rustic nature of the hut would be retained, but immediately after handing over the hut, the electricity and water lines, external shower and toilet facilities were added by WCNCB. We do however accept that an improvement in the basic level and practicality of services may have been necessary when considering long term or wider usage of the facility.*

*In looking at the current plan, our comments are as follows:*

- A practical issue related to any of the modifications proposed - the wind and corrosion at the hut can be excessive. If a shutter, window or door was left unlatched, it was often torn off its hinges. Fittings were generally of brass or stainless steel.*
- I can not see the relevance of the proposed ground and raised decks - the view from the hut is already out of this world. These will also be subject to wind and weather damage.*
- Because of the wind, we always braai'd a short way down the slope on the Northern side of Robberg, to the East of the hut. On all but the stillest days it will not be possible to braai at the hut without creating an elaborate and unsightly windbreak.*
- We did have benches alongside the hut - the possibility of permanent environmentally attractive benches, possibly made out of stone, could be acceptable. I am however*

- assuming that they intend to put benches on the lookout point in front of the hut, which would be visually prominent and potentially unattractive.*
- *In 40 years of using the hut, it was never found to be necessary to have a covered veranda. Because of the wind, this will probably end up being enclosed and unsightly. The hut is excellent in all weathers, cool on a hot still day, and warm when the wind is howling, and it was lovely to sit out on the benches in the sun on the side away from the wind.*
  - *One of the highlights of our times at the hut was the trip down to the gap to swim in the pools there. I realise that the clientele targeted to use the hut will probably want more than a shower to have their daily wash, but they are missing the point if they do not appreciate the rustic nature of the hut without the need for a pool, as there are many luxurious facilities in Plett where people can lounge next to pools, but the experience up at the hut is unique.*
  - *I sincerely hope that the interior will be left as is to retain the wonderful atmosphere, and not plastered and painted.*

Mary Fourie died on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in Formosa Garden Village, and the Fourie children gathered in Plettenberg Bay. Coincidentally, Cape Nature convened a meeting at the Community Centre in New Horizons to give the Plettenberg Bay Community an opportunity to comment on the proposals for the upgrading and commercialisation of the Thesen and Fourie huts on the Robberg. All four of us attended (Louis, Kit, James and Andrew) along with about 100 community members, who “identified themselves as residents of Plettenberg Bay and surrounds, several identified themselves as fishermen and one a guesthouse owner. A number of individuals identified themselves as members of organisations including the Plettenberg Bay Community Environmental Forum, New Horizon Pensioners Forum and the Aesthetics and Built Environment Committee of the Local Municipality. The Fourie family, one-time owners of the Fourie Hut, were represented by a number of individuals, two of whom made comment.” The community was not in favour of the proposed commercialisation.

The Thesen hut burnt down during a ‘controlled’ fynbos fire in March 2006.

PBCEF subsequently reported that the meeting with the Plettenberg Bay communities requested by Cape Nature to determine the future of the Fourie and Thesen Huts resulted in the proposals that:

- *The Fourie Hut be EITHER partially demolished to be used as a public view site OR razed to the ground.*
- *The Thesen Hut be either used at the start of the proposed Strandloper Trail OR razed to the ground.*

*PBCEF stated that new factors were affecting the decisions: -*

- *Strong public support for the Strandloper Trail starting at Robberg Nature Reserve and ending at Harkerville Forest (now under SANPARKS control), or maybe even through to Sinclair nature reserve next to Noetzie.*
- *The recent destruction by fire of the Thesen Hut*
- *The strong possibility that the Robberg Reserve could be declared a World Heritage site.*

*Cape Nature officials present agreed that: -*

*The Fourie Hut will be partially demolished to be used as a public view site. The footprint will be brought back to the walls of the original hut; all additions and buildings will be demolished. The walls of the original hut will be reduced to a low level. A coin-operated telescope and simple benches could be installed within the enclosure. Visitors will be restricted to the hut itself and not the surrounds.*

*The Plettenberg Bay community organisations should undertake and fund the demolition, removal of rubble and restoration of the natural habitat up to the walls of the hut, using local labour and skills.*

The minutes of the PBCEF meeting for 5<sup>th</sup> February 2008 record:

*Cape Nature asked the Forum to support a modification to the Robberg Huts Proposal, proposing the total demolition of the Fourie Hut rather than the original proposed partial demolition. This modification was unanimously accepted.*

This was probably a result of the realisation of how solid the walls of the hut were, and how difficult it would be to reduce them to half height - it would be easier just to demolish them completely.

In October 2008, a Heritage Consultant, Joanna Marx was appointed by Cape Nature, George, to “investigate two stone-built rondavels on the Robberg Nature Reserve, near Plettenberg Bay, and to prepare a heritage statement about them, including their cultural significance and the impact of the proposed demolition or of restoration and re-use”.

Her summary and recommendations were:

*The huts were specifically connected to two families, and are a remnant of a bygone way of holidaying. They are situated in an area that later became a nature reserve close to the town.*

*In view of the long-term local negotiations between Cape Nature and the PBCEF, and the current condition of the huts, it is recommended that they be demolished, that the sites be cleared and that the natural vegetation be restored.*

*The demolition process should be monitored for historical materials and any archaeological remnants, which should be photographed and recorded.*

*A public memory of the existence and history of the huts should be created in the Information Centre at Robberg Nature Reserve. A copy (or copies) of the Thesen Diaries 1931-1986 should be placed in the Knysna and/or Plettenberg Bay libraries.*

*The Building Control office of the Bitou Municipality must be informed in advance of the proposed demolition of the huts. A letter with property information and the reasons for the proposed demolition has been requested.*

In May 2010, the Hut was fully demolished.

## APPENDIX - THE GEOLOGY OF ROBBERG

### Lithology (The Main Rocks)

Robberg has a foundation of Table Mountain Series (TMS) quartzite which dips fairly steeply to the south and is exposed along both sides of the peninsula as far east as Duikerskranz and Moving Rock. Well-cemented Enon basal breccia, sandstone and large lenses of conglomerate of varying pebble-size overlie the TMS and likewise dip towards the south but at a shallower angle. The Enon beds are distinguished from the yellowish-orange TMS by their reddish-brown hues. Pleistocene dune-rock deposits are found on The Island and much of the peninsula, supporting vegetation which in some places is impenetrable.

### Geological History

The TMS quartzite was laid down 300 to 400 million years ago as sand in a shallow sea which had its shore in the region of present-day Transvaal. The sand was subsequently consolidated and later folded to form the magnificent Cape Folded Belt, which stretches westwards from Port Elizabeth to Cape Town and northwards to Van Rhynsdorp. One of the folds was situated at Plettenberg Bay where an anticline (arch) was created. The southern limb dipped south along the length of Robberg and the northern limb dipped north, beneath the Bitou end Keurbooms rivers, from Signal Hill.

About 150 million years ago, during the Cretaceous period, there was considerable erosion and much debris was spread over the TMS. This is today preserved in the form of a bed of coarse breccia<sup>1</sup> which lies at the base of the Enon Beds. At this time, Africa is thought to have formed part of a huge land-mass known as Gondwanaland, which began to split into its component continents. One split widened down the east coast of present-day Africa and eventually reached the Plettenberg Bay region. The debris was swiftly smoothed by the encroaching waves to form large beaches of pebbles which are today preserved as lenses of conglomerate. Their marine origin is confirmed by the presence of casts of sea-shells, (first reported in 1896 by a Mr Rex of Plettenberg Bay), which are situated a little to the west of The Gap above a thick bed of conglomerate.

The tension produced by the continental drift of Antarctica away from this part of South Africa caused faults to develop. Due to the formation of these planes of weakness it is my opinion that, the crest of the aforementioned anticline dropped down between two faults, one along the northern flank of Robberg end another along the southern face of Signal Hill. A third fault is reported along a line bisecting the Beacon Isle Estate. At the same time the whole peninsula was tilted gently towards the south.

During the Ice Ages, less than one million years ago, the sea fell several hundred feet below its present level and exposed large expanses of shelly sand. This was blown up to form huge sand dunes, the remnants of which are exposed along the coast of South Africa from Saldanha Bay to the Mozambique border. Downward-percolating rainwater caused the dunes to consolidate. On the return of the sea to its present level these formations were steadily demolished. The action of storm-waves produced platforms like Voorstraat and Agterstraat which are a characteristic world-wide feature of this particular rock-type.

Robberg Beach and Lookout Beach are both backed by what are thought to be bay-bars which may have developed from spits which gradually extended across the bays. In the course of time, lagoons were trapped within the bars. Behind Robberg Beach the lagoon disappeared as it became silted up, leaving marshy remnants here and there. Between Robberg Caravan Park and the ancient sea-cliffs lies such a remnant in the form of a reed-filled vlei.

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<sup>1</sup> Breccia: Consolidated debris forming a rock-type typified by angular fragments of rock of varying sizes. Well developed along the roof of the big cave on the south of the peninsula on the way from The Gap to The Island.

On the rugged slopes of Robberg, various wave-cut features are found ranging in height from Kanonkoeëlsgat, 8 feet above sea-level, to a wave-cut notch 250 feet above sea-level a little to the west of Witsand. Several large caves at various heights, well-known to fishermen and tourists alike, have been carved out of the cliffs particularly along the wave-battered southern coast. On the north coast, at least 150 feet above sea-level, is a little-known cave a few yards to the west of Duikerskranz which, like many of the other caves, contains substantial Strandloper deposits. As these wave-cut features occur over a range of altitudes greater than any Interglacial sea-level, it is concluded that the peninsula has moved up and down with respect to sea-level and that, geologically speaking, it has thus been quite unstable.

In the cave<sup>2</sup> at present being excavated by Mr Ray Inskeep of the Archaeology Department of the University of Cape Town, both Late Stone Age and Middle Stone Age artefacts have already been found in a well-stratified closed deposit. It is hoped that Early Stone Age tools will also be found on the floor of the deposit, as some have been identified in a "factory" on the slope of the peninsula above the tombolo by The Island. When radio-carbon dates are obtained for this South African Stone Age material direct age-comparisons with European material will be able to be made for the first time.

A fully illustrated copy of my project "The Geology of Robberg" can be examined at the Department of Geology, University of Cape Town. Mrs Forder is in charge of all projects and theses, including Roy Miller's project, "The Geology of Knysna". It is not permitted to remove projects from the Department, but they can be obtained for inspection at any time.

J Rogers 28.01.67

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<sup>2</sup> Mr Inskeep would appreciate it if visitors would steer pretty clear of the cave where he is excavating.