

Buchan is remembered in the land he loved . . .

"TWO pictures I have always carried to cheer me in dismal places," wrote Scottish novelist John Buchan in his autobiography. "One is of a baking noon on the highveld, the sky a merciless blue, the brown earth shimmering in a heat haze . . . the other is the Wood Bush in the Northern Transvaal which lies between Pietersburg and the eastern flats.

"I resolved to go back in my old age, build a dwelling, and leave my bones there."

This weekend Buchan was "welcomed home" by Mr Danie Hough, chairman of the South African Tourism Board, at the unveiling of a monument to the writer at Magoebaskloof, near Haenertsburg. The monument was the brainchild of a retired city diplomat, Mr John Oxley.

Buchan was born in 1875, the son of a Scots clergyman. He grew up in the Scottish Lowlands before moving to Glasgow where he went to university. He won a scholarship to Oxford where he started writing to earn pocket-money.

In 1901 he came to South Africa — which was devastated in the wake of the South African War — as assistant private secretary to Lord Milner. His job was to help with the rehabilitation of Boer women who had been in the concentration camps, and to establish a policy to revive agriculture in the Transvaal.

It was in the course of his duties that he came upon the Wood Bush and Magoebaskloof, "the meadows of the plateau", about which he wrote so glowingly: "The fairest country under the stars . . . I only wish my old father could have seen this place. He would have realised where the Garden of Eden was really situated."

After his return to England, he became a publisher, lawyer, soldier (in World War I), Member of Parliament, and finally, Governor General of Canada. He was also granted a peerage and took the title Lord Tweedsmuir. He became known chiefly as a prodigious author, not only of serious and legal works, but especially of adventure novels such



The new John Buchan Memorial against the backdrop of the Ebenezer Dam near Magoebaskloof.

as *The Thirty-nine Steps*, *Greenmantle* and *Prester John*.

He was the first noted writer of English prose to use Afrikaans words dotted about his novels, which contain many references to South Africa: Richard Hannay, the famous character from *The Thirty-nine Steps*, is a South African mining engineer.

His autobiography was published after his death in 1940, and no notice was taken of his wish to be buried in South Africa, a country he had grown to love during the two years he worked here.

The idea of erecting a monument for Buchan was originally conceived by Mr John Oxley, a Pretoria resident retired from the Foreign Service.

"I thought here was a man who had done a lot for South Africa, and this has never been acknowledged," he said.

Two years ago, Mr Oxley talked to some friends in Magoebaskloof, and the idea of erecting a monument was first expressed. Mr Oxley and three friends, Messrs Michael Brawn, Douglas Renwill Penwill and Ivor Wells, started collecting money for the project.

Permission was given by the Administrator of the Transvaal, Mr Willem Cruywagen and the monument was erected.

The monument is a simple chunk of local granite, with a plaque bearing words from Buchan's autobiography attached to it.

It overlooks the Ebenezer Dam, where the Broederstroom flows into the Letaba; the Wood Bush on the one side, and the Iron Crown Mountain, of which Buchan wrote in *Prester John*, on the other.

The unveiling was planned for the weekend, but continued rain meant that it had to take place in the Magoebaskloof Hotel.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr Hough, who once practised law in the nearby Pietersburg, paid tribute to the great writer.

"The wish expressed in the autobiography is the wish of someone who loved this place very dearly," he said.

"John Buchan, today I believe we have fulfilled your wish."