

HONORARY GRADUATE

James William Kitching

James William Kitching was born on 6 February 1922 in the town of Graaff-Reinet in the Karoo. Having been brought up in the Karoo, his real love has always been the fossil reptiles from this area. He was introduced to these 'beasties' at an early age, as his father, Croonie Kitching, was a friend of Dr Robert Broom and used to collect fossils for him. James and his two brothers, Ben and Scheepers, would accompany their father on fossil hunts and mastered the art of fossil collecting.

James Kitching found his first fossil at the age of six and now, sixty-eight years later, he is still gathering fossils and still gets fired up and excited by each and every find. When he was only seven years old he discovered his first type specimen, named *Youngopsis kitchingi* in his honour by Dr Robert Broom.

After demobilisation at the end of the Second World War James Kitching accepted the position of field officer (and first member of staff) of the recently established Bernard Price Foundation for Palaeontological Research at the University of the Witwatersrand, with the mandate to collect Karoo fossils for its collection. He started working at the University on 26 October and with his characteristic drive and enthusiasm he was already in the field by the beginning of November. His first port of call was the Graaff-Reinet district to discover fossils from the area in which he had grown up and which he knew well. Since then his collecting horizons have expanded and today there are few places in the Karoo where he has not been. He has spent numerous months away from home, walked many kilometres, and accumulated thousands of fossils, most of which are housed at the Bernard Price Institute for Palaeontological Research as a lasting monument to his skill and unbounded energy. These pursuits have only been possible because of the keen and loving support of his devoted wife, Betty, and his three children, Marie, Matthew and Felicity, who frequently endured long periods at home without their father while he was combing the hills.

James Kitching's garnering of Karoo age fossils has not been confined to South Africa, he has also undertaken expeditions to Zambia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho. Because of his great flair and ability, he was invited to take part in collecting expeditions to North America, Brazil and the Argentine. One of the many highlights of his career was in 1970 when he was invited to Antarctica as part of the United States Arctic Research Programme. Professor Kitching will go on record as the first person to identify a fossil mammal-like reptile in the Antarctic and so, on palaeontological grounds, prove the earlier close continental links between southern Africa and the Antarctic.

The highland in Antarctica, now officially mapped as Kitching Ridge, bears testimony to the fact that, despite hostile conditions and rugged terrain, the Antarctic fossils could not escape the eagle eye of James Kitching. Dr Ned Colbert, renowned American palaeontologist and organiser of the expedition to the Antarctic, said 'of all the fossil hunters with whom I have been associated, none is the equal of James Kitching. He has an eye for fossils that is truly phenomenal, and his ability to discover fossils is justly celebrated on numerous continents'.

Professor Kitching has published several important papers on various facets of palaeontology, but his greatest contributions must be his publications on the distribution and biostratigraphy of Karoo fossils. His contribution to the Karoo palaeontology of southern Africa and indeed, Gondwana, is unrivalled, and has earned him international recognition to the extent that he is the recognised authority on the stratigraphic and distributional relationships of Permo-Triassic tetrapods from South Africa.

He has, in addition, been involved in the study of Pleistocene mammals. In this regard he has excavated and researched fossils from several cave sites, the most notable being the Cave of of Hearths, and also the

famous Limeworks at Makapansgat where, in 1947, he discovered the first *Australopithecus* on the site. He was involved with the analysis of the fossils from the Pinhole Cave in England and spent some time in the Netherlands, Belgium and France studying Palaeolithic mammalian faunas.

Professor James Kitching has spent his entire professional career working at the University of the Witwatersrand where he has been instrumental in building the Bernard Price Institute for Palaeontological Research into an institute which is internationally recognised for the study of the fossil heritage of southern Africa. At the time of his retirement in 1990, he was a reader in Karoo Biostratigraphy and also director of the Bernard Price Institute. Since his retirement, he has been appointed Honorary Professorial Research Fellow at the Institute.

The University is proud to be able to express its appreciation to James William Kitching for his distinguished contribution to the palaeontological community and the university by conferring on him the degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*.