

Napier's Unique Home-made Sundial

Near the entrance to the municipal office of Napier, stands a large vertical sundial, probably the only one of its kind in South Africa. It was built by Danie du Toit in 1965. From childhood he had a keen interest in stars and a sharp sense of interpreting shadows. He noted that one pillar at the Napier station, where he worked, was longer in winter. He also saw that the shadow fell in the same place, four times a year. He read an article written by CJ Langenhoven on sundials, reprinted in Die Burger of 16 July 1936. This inspired him to start on his own sundial. The municipality supplied the material and Jan Engel was the plasterer. The town clerk at the time, Cecil Fick lent a hand with the process.

Danie was able to establish north and south without a compass, by studying the shadows at midday. He then built an east to west line. After the gnomon, (a metal rod) was put into position he started making marks — one for every two minutes. He worked for one and a half years to complete the marks. Then he made a table to indicate the correction between standard and sundial time. By using the table, the time can be read to an accuracy of half a minute.

Danie du Toit died in 1974, but his sundial is still there — a lasting monument to his ingenuity — and is a popular sight worth seeing.

By SJ du Toit