



MOUNTAIN BACKPACKERS CLUB

Fixture List: April - June 2015

CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER – 2nd Quarter 2015

Welcome Autumn hiking, some drier weather and some fine hiking conditions!

Enjoy this latest edition of the Mountain Backpacker's Club's Magazine and Fixtures list. There are a host of events to choose from. From Novices to Veterans, you are all spoilt for choice.

Many thanks to the contributors of the stories in the MBC magazine that entertain us, and for the pictures to accompany them. It makes navigating these routes an easier task for those of us who have never done them. If you would like to contribute a short story on your hikes with the MBC, please send them to chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za.

The Grand Traverse is being attempted by 10 MBC Members from 28.03.2015 to 12.04.2015. Dave Gay is leading the intrepid crew from North to South of the Drakensberg (the Amphitheatre to St Bernards Peak), about 250km, over 15 days. Resupplies are at Sani Top (the kit has already been delivered), and at Bannermans, a long hike led by Grant Wilkinson. The team is in the most capable hands, thanks Dave. And from all of us on the MBC committee, we wish you extraordinary views, spectacular experiences and safe travels. You make us very proud. This is the MBC's premier annual event. It is hard core. And this achievement really does mean something!

If you have travelled somewhere exciting and would like to share your experiences with us at one of the MBC Thursday night socials, please contact me on chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za. We are always scouting for speakers to entertain us. From Monkeys, Crowned Eagles and Reptiles to International and Exotic travels, we want to hear it all. Please also forward any suggestions if you have heard any great talks lately.

We will be updating our Socials calendar (that is a bit bare at the time of going to print), so keep an eye on the MBC Facebook page and on your emails for your updates. New members, there will be a special evening set aside for you at one of these socials. Here we will talk on hiking equipment, packing, food, hiking etiquette and boots. A highly recommended evening to attend if you are new to hiking, a bit rusty or are planning to expand your hiking equipment and wardrobe collection.

Happy travels, stay warm and we will see you OUT THERE!

Karen Miller
Chairman: MBC

MOUNTAIN BACKPACKERS CLUB COMMITTEE

Chairman	Karen Miller	082 742 3266
Vice Chairman	John McGovern	082 659 5111
Treasurer	Bobby Stanton	031 465 5535
Fixture List / Magazine	Alan Etchells	082 398 4103
Marketing	Heidi Cox	082 706 4283
Committee member	Chris Cox	082 466 8814
Social media	Brett Bentley	
New member mentorship	Sorin Dimitriu	084 681 8920
Recruitment	Roy Bowden	082 901 5301
Website	Jovita da Silva	
Student / youth liaison	Amy Grantham	
Leadership liaison	Jacquie Kennedy	083 399 9255
Secretary / admin: (paid position)	Philip van Gass	083 440 1651

Fax: 086 504 3382

Postal Address: P O Box 37702, OVERPORT, 4067

Website: www.mountainbackpackers.co.za

Email: info@mountainbackpackers.co.za

THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO WELCOME THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS TO THE CLUB

Dominique Ogilvie

Dayanand Khadua

Balint Palinko

Stephen Mylrea

Craig de Busser

Ingrid Macgregor

Brian Merryweather

Jon-Paul Connell

NOTE: It is with deep sadness that we heard of the passing of Wendy Pirie on Jan 8th 2015. Wendy has been a member of MBC for 21 years. The Committee & members would like to express their condolences.

THE GRADING OF HIKES

1. Very easy trip
2. Easy trip
3. Moderate trip - physical fitness advisable
4. Strenuous trip - **physical fitness essential**
5. **Very strenuous** trip requiring a high degree of fitness

Please take particular note of **distance and height** as well as the **grading of the backpacking trip** you intend doing and ensure that your level of fitness is adequate.

FIXTURE LIST – 2nd QUARTER

April 2015

Date	Description	Distance / Height	Leader	Contact	Grade
3 rd – 6 th April	GIANTS CASTLE: Grand Traverse 2015 Resupply -Bannerman Hut, Bannerman Pass and Giant's Castle Pass. Tents required	45km/ 1600m	Grant Wilkinson	gwilky@gmail.com	4-5
11 – 12 th April	INJASUTI - Backpacking hike via Van Heyningen's Pass to & overnight in Wonder Valley Cave - good venue for less experienced backpackers - lovely pool for swimming & stream for water close by. Combined hike with MBC - Last bookings by 30 March. Cost: R55 EACH	11- 12km each day	Keith Ashton	Tel: 033 239 5023 Email keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	3
11 – 12 th April	HIGHMOOR: Tenting - day hikes to painting sites. Book by e-mail only. Last booking by 7 th April NB I must book through QEP they want the money straight away - so book early please!!!!!! Cost – R60pp	11- 12km each day	Dave Sclanders	Email only: dave@bergfree.co.za	3
18 – 19 th April	VERGELEGEN: Sleep in BIRDS NEST CAVE and return via Sulphur Springs Meet at Vergeleglen 8.30am	28 km	Christine Bro / John Pickup	christinebro3@gmail.com 0827826025 johnpickup9@gmail.com 0721512031	3/4
18 th April	KLOOF GORGE DAY HIKE. Leaving at 8.30am from the picnic site carpark. Small entrance fee. Bring sun protection, hat, water, snacks and a rain jacket. Moderate fitness required. Confirm with John beforehand.	4 – 5 hrs	John McGovern	John 082 6595111	2
25 – 27 th April	GARDEN CASTLE: Wilson's Cave via Castle View farm; Fun Cave via Eland Flats; return via Mzimkhulu Pipeline.	32km 460 m	David Gay	Ph: 031-7640298 (18h00 - 20h00 Mon-Thurs only) Email: cougar1@telkomsa.net	3-4
24 – 26 th April	DRAKENSBERG GARDENS - Cottage weekend. Fully equipped and very comfortable. Beautiful area in the heart of the mountains. Max 10 members. Day hikes from cottage or simply unwind on the property (10 acres). DSTV for news & Sport etc. Hot baths and showers. Combined with Mountain Backpackers. Please book early to secure your place. First come and paid first served. Last bookings by 13 April. Cost: R200 total pp (R100 pppn)	12- 15km each day	Keith Ashton	Tel: 033 239 5023 Email keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	2-3

May 2015

Date	Description	Distance / Height	Leader	Contact	Grade
1 st – 3 rd May	MONKS COWL: Stable Cave via Steilberg and Jacob's Ladder; Zulu Cave via Hospitalspruit, Eagle Gorge and Cat Cave; return via Hlatikhulu Nek and the Sphinx. Optional climb: Ntunja (Gatberg).	38km 940 m	David Gay	Ph: 031-7640298 (18h00 - 20h00 Mon-Thurs only) Email: cougar1@telkomsa.net	3-4

1 st – 3 rd May (3 day weekend)	MNWENI: Start at Mnweni Cultural Centre 1st May, overnight either in 5 STAR CAVE , or SHEPHERDS CAVE . Ascend Mnweni Pass to spend the night in either MPONJWANE or LEDGERS . The sun should waken us up bright and early on the 3 rd day for a early start down Rockeries pass. Meet at Mnweni Cultural Centre to start walking at 9am NOTE: Head for heights essential if we use Ledgers Cave & fitness is a requirement. If you would like to donate any hiking equipment or clothing to the guides, it is always appreciated.	40km	Christine Bro / John Pickup	christinebro3@gmail.com 0827826025 johnpickup9@gmail.com 0721512031	3-4
1 st – 3 rd May	BUSHMAN'S NEK- Short (one km) backpacking to Bushman's Nek Hut for a two-night stay.- Beautiful day hikes from this base to see waterfalls, bushmen's paintings, caves & lovely pools for swimming. Hut has lockable rooms with bunk beds & mattresses + flush toilets & showers (only cold water but no problem) - Combined hike with Mountain Backpackers. Please book early to secure place - last bookings 17 April. Cost: R90 pppn (R180 Total pp)	12- 15km each day	Keith Ashton	Tel: 033 239 5023 email keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	2-3
9 – 10 th May	SENTINEL PEAK: Back by popular demand - climb to the top of Sentinel (reached via Witsieshoek, Free State) with premier mountain guide and instructor, Gavin Raubenheimer. R500 per person. All climbing gear supplied except climbing shoes or boots.		Gavin Raubenheimer	0829905876 or gavin@peakhigh.co.za	-
16 – 17 th May	BUSHMAN'S NEK: Tarn Cave via Cedric's Pool and Ostrich Cave, returning via Gargoyle Cave and Vast Cave.	26km 700 m	David Gay	Ph: 031-7640298 (18h00 - 20h00 Mon-Thurs only) Email: cougar1@telkomsa.net	3-4
16 – 17 th May	INJASUTHI: Trip to Lower Injasuti Cave. Suitable for first time hikers who have never slept in a cave. Steady relaxed pace.	16 km	Clive Powell	clive.powell@gmail.com	3
17 th May	UMDLOTI to UMHLANGA - beach walk and lunch at Bush Tavern. 12.5km on sand, meet at 08h00 start at 08h15 Umdlotti Beach carpark	12,5km	Heidi Cox	0827064283 / heidi.dinan@gmail.com	2
16 th May	KLOOF GORGE DAY HIKE. Leaving at 8.30am from the picnic site carpark. Small entrance fee. Bring sun protection, hat, water, snacks and a rain jacket. Moderate fitness required. Confirm with John beforehand.	4 – 5 hrs	John McGovern	082 6595111	2
24 th May	EAST COAST RADIO BIG WALK: Anyone who is doing the Walk and is keen to get together for a coffee afterwards, let Heidi Cox know. Register at: http://bigwalkdurban.topevents.co.za/	5km, 10km or 20km	Heidi Cox	0827064283 heidi.dinan@gmail.com	
23 rd – 24 th May	MONKS COWL: STABLE CAVE, Via Jacobs Ladder. Return via Hlathikulu Nek. Meet at Monks Cowl at 8.30am	28km	Christine Bro / John Pickup	christinebro3@gmail.com 0827826025 johnpickup9@gmail.com 0721512031	3-4
30 – 31 st May	COBHAM: Mzimkhulwana Hut via Giant's Cup Trail, returning via Siphongweni Rock National Monument rock art site.	20km 395m	David Gay	Ph: 031-7640298 (18h00 - 20h00 Mon-Thurs only) Email: cougar1@telkomsa.net	3-4

June 2015

Date	Description	Distance / Height	Leader	Contact	Grade
20 th June	KLOOF GORGE DAY HIKE. Leaving at 8.30am from the picnic site carpark. Small entrance fee. Bring sun protection, hat, water, snacks and a rain jacket. Moderate fitness required. Confirm with John beforehand.	4 – 5 hrs	John McGovern	John 082 6595111	2
20 th – 21 st June	HIGHMOOR / GLENGARRY: Winter solstice in AASVOELKRANS CAVE. For the energetic, meet at Glen Garry Campsite and we walk up to Highmoor from there. Our Flintstone Masterchef will judge our soup evening. Your soup will be judged for flavour, appearance and most unusual.	8km ex Highmoor & extra 20km ex Glengary	Christine Bro / John Pickup	christinebro3@gmail.com 0827826025 johnpickup9@gmail.com 0721512031	3
27 th June	AFRICAN FISH EAGLE TRAIL: Lots of birdlife, walk through Beachwood Mangroves and along North bank of Umgeni river, meet at Green Hub Durban @ 08h00 & leave 08h15. Rain stops Play. Bring cash for tea at Springfield SPCA 1/2 way.	13km	Heidi Cox	0827064283 / heidi.dinan@gmail.com	2
27 – 28 th June	COBHAM: Gxalingenwa Cave. Up Emerald Stream, back via the HIGH road. Will need warm winter gear. Visit Rock Art along the way. Last booking 22 nd June. Cost – R60pp	12Km each day	Dave Sclanders	Email only: dave@bergfree.co.za	3
27 – 28 th June	GARDEN CASTLE: Whyte's Cave via the Giant's Cup Trail, returning via Hidden Valley.	31km 670m	David Gay	Ph: 031-7640298 (18h00 - 20h00 Mon-Thurs only) Email: cougar1@telkomsa.net	3-4

Advance Notices

2015 can be your opportunity to become a regular cave dweller and possibly win the title of **Mr or Ms** Flintstone .

We have selected 17 interesting caves and routes from various areas.

These hikes will be lead and organized by either John, Christine or Clint

John Pickup: 0721512031 johnpickup9@gmail.com

Christine Pickup : 0827826025 christinebro3@gmail.com

Clinton Bro: 0828202139 clintstimbers@gmail.com

DATES	CAVES AND ROUTE DESCRIPTION	AREA	Kms	GRADE
18 th – 19 th July	CANNIBAL CAVE: From Monks Cowl, because the views from Shada Ridge are magnificent. Return via the houses.	Monks Cowl	40km	3/4
8 th – 10 th Aug (3 day weekend)	Meet at Bushman's Nek and we shall follow the Bushman's River to BUSHMANS CAVE. Day 2 we will make our way to sleep in WHYTES CAVE exploring the area as we go along. Return on the 3 rd day via the Giants Cup trail	Bushmans Nek	30 km	4/5
25 th – 27 th Sep	Stand on either end of the "Giants Cup" something to remember every time you travel into Underberg and see the cup. First night will be spent in SPECTACLE CAVE. Following day we take our packs with us to C30, Hide them and with a hop, skip and jump we will be up Masubasuba Pass. Climb Hodson's Peak South, the Hodson's Peak North. Come down to C30 where hopefully our packs will still be. Over the Hub to GXALINGENWA CAVE where we can rest our weary bones. The following day we return to our cars via Pinnacle Rock and Emerald Dome.	Cobham	38km	4/5
24 th – 25 th Oct	In remembrance of our friend Luciano. ROLANDS CAVE We will walk up Mikes Pass, Organ Pipes and return via the Camel.	Didima	30	3/4

21 st – 22 nd Nov or 20 th – 22 ND	Not often visited is GRASSCUTTERS CAVE in Mnweni. To embrace the Mnweni village life, join us on the Friday 20 th Nov as we spend the day at the Cultural Centre cycling, chatting with the locals and enjoying a Juba with them at one of the many spaza shops. Camp or book a bed at the Centre. Otherwise we see you 8.30am Sat at the Cultural Centre to start hiking to Grasscutters Cave.	Mnweni	36	3/4
12 th – 13 th Dec	End the year off with a Flintstone Christmas in “Mini Paradise.” A short walk to the beautiful CYPRUS CAVE , where one can dive into the pools for a refreshing swim, and sit either on the grass or on a rock chair around the rock table. The distance from the cars to cave is only 3.5 km, therefore we can carry loads of Christmas snacks and pressies to share. A prize for the best dressed Flintstone. Lunch at the Bierfassel on the way home. Ps. There is another cave opposite the river which could also be used for sleeping.	Mkomazi	7	

Advance Notices (cont)

Date	Description	Distance / Height	Leader	Contact	Grade
19 th Sept	INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEANUP - a very important international event on the environmental calendar (3rd Saturday of Sept). Meet at 08h00 Umhlanga Nature Reserve carpark (Lagoon Drive next to Breakers Resort Umhlanga).	2km	Heidi Cox	0827064283 / heidi.dinan@gmail.com	1
31 st Dec – 2 nd Jan 16	BUSHMAN'S NEK- CELEBRATE NEW YEAR IN STYLE IN A STUNNING AREA - Short (one km) backpacking to Bushman's Nek Hut for a two-night stay.- Beautiful day hikes from this base to see waterfalls, bushmen's paintings, caves & lovely pools for swimming. Hut has lockable rooms with bunk beds & mattresses + flush toilets & showers (only cold water but no problem) - Combined hike with Midlands Hiking Club. Bring your favourite tippie & goodies to celebrate. - Please book early to secure place - last bookings by 14 Dec. New cost after 01/11/15 - R100 pppn (R200 Total pp)	12- 15km each day	Keith Ashton	Tel: 033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	2-3

Gavin Raubenheimer, a premier mountain guide and instructor, is offering two courses which are new to the MDT (Gavin is an MDT Instructor). Both are "Skills courses", so they are not for assessment, but just as a way for people to acquire the skills for hiking and climbing. They are also not Leadership courses in anyway.

a) Rock Climbing Skills course on the 11-12 July to take place at Monteseel and Shongweni.
Max 4 people at a price of R1600 each. (usually R2200 pp)

b) Hiking Skills course. Can take up to 6 people R1900 (normal price R2800)

If you are interested in attending any of these climbs/courses, please contact Gavin Raubenheimer directly on 0829905876 or gavin@peakhigh.co.za

Note: It is the prerogative of a hike leader to accept or reject members or other applicants from participating in his or her hike, after questioning the applicant on their fitness and experience. It is a privilege not a right to participate in a hike.

Day hikers are requested to phone the leader beforehand to confirm their attendance and that the hike is still on schedule.

MINERVA HEIGHTS PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE 14th DECEMBER 2014

by David Tighe



A steep well maintained gravel road up the mountain eventually brought us to the Minerva Heights nature reserve, where we parked our vehicles at the farm house, and prepared for an enjoyable stroll in the country. The reserve is situated high above the Byrne valley at around 1500m above sea level. It lies along the midlands mist belt zone and well above the coastal humidity. One is immediately struck by the freshness of the air, the reason for this soon becomes clear as one looks over the spectacular indigenous forest which provide a green lung of note.

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The reserve is situated high above the Byrne valley at around 1500m above sea level. It lies along the midlands mist belt zone and well above the coastal humidity. One is immediately struck by the freshness of the air, the reason for this soon becomes clear as one looks over the spectacular indigenous forest which provide a green lung of note. Unfortunately many of the real giants have gone, felled for timber from the 1800s to the 1940s. The network of trails in this reserve range from 2km to 20km, and are suitable for all levels of hiking fitness.

Ten of us started off from the farm house in warm cloudless conditions with a cool easterly breeze and headed along the road to descend through an indigenous forest which offered cool shady conditions.

We emerged from the forest and proceeded up to The Peak, an area of particular interest for the botanist, which is controlled by the Wild Life Society. The well managed winter controlled burn and the response to the fires certainly paid off, as the abundance of wild flowers and grasses, and in particular the bright red Hilton daisy were a brilliant display to say the least.

Our route now starts to gently rise as we climbed up Cunningham Castle to lookout rock, the vista overlooks a stunning panoramic view of the beautiful Byrne valley, a patchwork mosaic of small holdings, agricultural and plantation land and surrounding indigenous forest.



We then proceeded up the track to the relay masts, which is the highest point of the hike and continued on to Picnic Rock, passing a herd of Bless buck on route.

At Picnic Rock three members of the group spent time exploring the caves beneath the rock. We started our



return as the development of low level cumulus cloud started to build up on the eastern horizon with the promise of a late afternoon thunder storm. At the junction to Porcupine dam the group split, with most going along with Philip leading them down to the dam. As they approached the dam there was a very loud distinctive rattling croaking sound, which Neville identified as a Blue Crane. The Crane flew down stream still repeating its very loud call to distract them, Philip found the reason for hawk attracted by the commotion appeared on the scene, making two low swoops, much to the concern of the group who tried to chase it away, but only succeeded in agitating the Crane more.

Meanwhile Moira and I had taken the more strenuous route back through the grasslands to the farm and arrived back at the farm shortly after the main group.

Whether it be the beautiful views of the surrounding country side, the magnificent indigenous forest, the abundance of wild flowers, the inspirational encounter with the Crane or Malcom's fascinating, interesting museum this hike will always remain memorable.

Thanks to Philip, Chris, Mike, Susie, John, Moira, Neville, Earle & Mumtaz for their companionship on this enjoyable hike.

HIKE TO PHOLELA CAVE 10-11th JANUARY 2015 by David Tighe

As one descends along the last hill approaching Underberg, the impressive, conspicuous Hodgson's Peaks 3051m comes into view. Also known as "The Giants Cup," which was originally named by Captain AF Gardener and renamed in later times as Hodgson's Peak. This mountain takes its second name from a Natal farmer Thomas



Hodgson, who while out with a party led by Caption Proudfoot and trailing Bushman cattle rustlers, was accidentally shot in the thigh by one of his comrades. He died of his wound, thus leaving his name on the map through this unfortunate accident. Our planned destination to Pholela Cave {Cool River}, lies at the base of this mountain.

After obtaining the necessary permits and filling in the mountain register, we set off in absolutely perfect summer conditions, following the start of the popular Giants Cup Trail for a short distance before heading towards the next prominent landmark, Whale Rock



also known as Boundary Rock, as this also is the boundary of the parks control.

The route from then onwards would follow the Pholela River, which would be our companion for the rest of this hike. Monster Rocks were our next prominent landmark before arriving at Shelter which is the junction of the Pholela and iNhlabni Rivers, 9km from the car park.

After a short break we tackled the first of a number of river crossings, and with boots squelching with water made our way to the next river crossing. As we started to gain altitude the landscape opened up to reveal the true beauty of the foothills, the deep valleys with innumerable streams cutting through and cascading down to waterfalls as well as the beautiful cave sandstone rock formations and outcrops, all this added to the natural beauty of this area.

It was at this point that I started to experience breathing difficulty as well as an extremely rapid pulse rate. I could only put this condition down to altitude sickness, this condition does occur to some people who live at sea level, but what really worried me was the fact that no matter what I tried, my pulse rate would not come down.



I then decided, as there were reliable leaders in the group to slow down and lead from the back.

Meanwhile Philip had gone straight to Spectacle Cave, where he Jeffrey and Hettie had settled down to afternoon coffee. As this cave could not accommodate the entire group, it was decided to proceed to Pholela Cave as planned. The typical late afternoon thunder storm that had been threatening had passed over with only a few drops of rain as we headed for our overnight stay.

It was very disappointing to find that because of the wet summer conditions the cave could only comfortably accommodate four of us, so Philip and Jeffrey volunteered to returned to overnight at Spectacle Cave whilst Hettie, Jill, Mike and myself made ourselves at home in Pholela Cave. We experienced a terrific lightning and thunder storm during the night, and we were very grateful to be in a safe position under cover.

It had been decided on an early start and we all met up below Spectacle Cave to take the same route back to Cobham. This relaxed pace suited me perfectly as I was by then more acclimatized to the altitude, and there would be plenty of time to really appreciate the beauty of the area. I spent some time in the forest section where the vegetation included Berg Bamboo, Berg Cypress numerous attractive flowering plants including ground orchids, lilies and members of the Iris family. Whilst all along the route the Agapanthus were a delightful feature with their beautifully poised blue heads on their tall straight stalks, whilst around every corner the flowers would fill a whole gully with massed colour.

Many thanks to Philip, Jeffery, Mike, Hettie and Jill for their comradeship and patience shown.

I returned home refreshed and inspired, not only in body and mind, but spiritually as well.

GIANT'S CUP TRAIL HIKE - 26-29 DECEMBER 2014

BY KATHY KRUGER



The Giant's Cup Hiking Trail is a 5-day trail, in the southern berg, starting along the infamous Sani Pass road and finishing at Bushman's Nek. The trail can be shortened to a 4-day hike by starting at Cobham and finishing at the carpark at Bushman's Nek, the option that we chose, due to time constraints. The trail derives its name from the "giant cup" or the "u-shape" between Hodgson's Peaks, the twin peaks located south of Sani Pass that dominate the south Drakensberg skyline. The berg is steeped in history and the naming of many of the peaks encountered on the trail makes for interesting reading. My write-up starts from Day 2 of the original trail and ends on Day 5. No one in our group had done this hike before so it was a journey of discovery for us all.

DAY 2: PHOLELA HUT TO MZIMKHULWANA HUT, COBHAM (9km)

The three and a half hour drive from our hometown, coupled with the logistics of getting to the start of the trail meant that we had a much later than usual start. We were collected from the end point at Bushman's Nek and driven to the start of Day 2 by our drivers, Matthew and Andrew. Our party of 9 comprised a few first time hikers, the youngest being 13. After adjusting backpacks, applying copious amounts of sunblock and a quick photo shoot, we were on our way. It's a bit daunting leading a group of hikers when one has not done the trail before. All I had to go on was what I had read on various websites and what hikers whom I had spoken to had told me. How we all stomped right over the first GIANT footprint demarcating the start of the trail, practically 100 metres from our starting point, I'll never know. I think we were all too busy talking. Lesson learnt. As we progressed along the trail, I was concerned that I hadn't seen any footprints and fortunately, albeit 2 kilometres down the trail, two hikers graciously pointed out that we were indeed on the wrong trail. It was at this point that Tom casually mentioned that he had seen a white footprint earlier, not realising the significance thereof - quite clearly no-one was paying attention when I mentioned it at the start of our hike. So, what should have been the shortest day of the trail became the longest day.

Unfortunately the large sandstone "Tortoise Rocks" which we passed, went almost unnoticed due to the waning energy levels of the group and the well-known Bathplug Cave (so called because of the hole in the floor of the cave, through which water drains) was bypassed, due to it not being on our map and us having to look for it, in our attempt to make up for lost time. The temperature was dropping and there was the ever present threat of rain, which fortunately held out until later in the evening. Mzimkhulwana Hut, the most remote of the huts on the trail, was a welcome sight and it was shortly before 6 p.m. that we finally crossed the bridge over the Siphongweni River and arrived at our first overnight stop. It had been a long day. Due to our late arrival, we unfortunately never got to see or swim in the large pool on the Siphongweni River, nor explore the area. The weight of overloaded backpacks had taken their toll and blisters and sore feet were common ailments. A quick shower, then supper and our group dived for bed.

DAY 3: MZIMKHULWANA HUT TO WINTERHOEK HUT, GARDEN CASTLE (12.2km)

To get to the start of Day 3, one backtracks slightly along the Siphongweni River and crosses over the Mzimkhulwana River, via a hanging bridge. The path veers slightly to the right and heads up the Bamboo Mountain, so named because of the berg bamboo that grows there. Eventually one reaches a plateau between the Little Bamboo and Bamboo Mountains (ironically, Little Bamboo Mountain is both larger and higher than Bamboo Mountain). Thereafter, one passes Crane Tarn (a small mountain lake, where one may be fortunate enough to see blue cranes) - it was unfortunately shrouded in mist on our hike, a protea woodland and a number of trout dams. One is never far from civilisation on this hike with farmhouses and various resorts in the area well within view. I found it quite odd to be walking with a full backpack for about 2km down the main tar road towards the Castleburn

Lake turn, which took us to our next overnight stop. A short climb up and over a hill and we were almost there. Winterhoek Hut lies nestled at the foot of Garden Castle mountain and comprises 8 rondavels, idyllically set among some oak trees. The day's walk had been a lot easier than the previous day and spirits were high on reaching the hut. There were those who opted for an afternoon snooze while some of us went for a short walk behind the huts, the baboons keeping an ever watchful eye on us. That night the heavens opened.

DAY 4: WINTERHOEK HUT TO SWIMAN HUT, GARDEN CASTLE (12.8km)

We awoke to a perfect day after the heavy downpour the night before. The group were really getting into the swing of things and soon learnt the cues and expected hiking etiquette, without being prompted. The trail climbs steeply behind the huts to Black Eagle pass, which is the breeding and feeding ground of both the Black Eagle and the Bearded Vulture. Eventually a plateau is reached and one has views of the Mlambonja and Mzimkhulwana Rivers on the right and the magnificent Mzimude River on the left. The popular Drakensberg Gardens Hotel is visible on the right a bit further on as is Garden Castle. Swiman Hut can be seen from quite far, nestled among the gum trees at the base of Garden Castle. It is an old forestry hut which has electricity and although more than adequate, is in need of renovation. The hot shower in the outside building was a godsend. It was a relaxed afternoon, with some opting to take a short walk in the area and others lazing on the verandah, chatting. Swiman Peak is clearly visible from the verandah. It rained in the late afternoon and continued well into the night. Thanks to Tom, we had a roaring log fire going in the lounge, around which we ate supper and chatted merrily while the younger hikers played cards, the noise levels ever escalating.

DAY 5: SWIMAN HUT TO THE FINISH AT BUSHMAN'S NEK, GARDEN CASTLE (12km)

There are some steep climbs on this section of the trail and a long and steep downhill towards the finish. It was a hot day and after exiting the Sunken Valley, a refreshing swim and a fun photo shoot at the Mzimude River was a welcome break. We passed Langalabilele Cave and stopped to have a look at some Bushman paintings, faded by their exposure to the sun. As with all caves in the berg where Bushman paintings are located, sleeping in this cave is prohibited. One continues on towards Langalabilele Peak, with the old fire-lookout tower, atop a hill, visible on the left of the trail. The green roofed buildings of the Bushman's Nek Berg & Trout Resort become visible in the valley as do the Devils's Knuckles up near Sehlabathebe, on a clear day. The steep and winding trail eventually drops into the valley with Bushman's Nek hut visible on ones right, a short distance off the trail as well as the Bushman's River, in front of one. Our journey was almost over and the mood became somewhat subdued as we headed for the carpark, where we'd left our vehicles 3 days earlier.

A quick shower, courtesy of the KZN Wildlife Office and a delicious lunch at the Bushman's Nek Berg & Trout Resort and we were once again on the road, homeward bound.

The near-perfect weather (we did have a tiny bit of rain and mist, which at times obscured our views) and the good company contributed to making this a most enjoyable and memorable hike. It was also really good to see some new faces on the hiking scene and to have some youngsters in our group, which added a fun element to the hike. The Giant's Cup Trail is one of South Africa's best known trails and I was most impressed with the efforts of our first time hikers. What an awesome bunch. I hope that it will not be the last time that we see them. Despite our initial hiccup in locating the trail, the trail is, for the most part, well-marked, with white footprints indicating both the trail and the direction. The climbs are never that hectic and the elevation of the huts is between 1645-1845metres, with some of the passes and trails hovering in the region of 2000metres. The average time taken to get to the various huts each day was about 6 hours, although our first day would have been a lot quicker, if we hadn't missed the turn. This was intended to be a relaxed hike and a gentle introduction for those new to hiking and that it was.

Though I generally prefer hiking in the higher berg and in particular, the northern berg, mainly because of the remoteness of the trails, there is some allure about the Giant's Cup Trail.

The only real disappointment on the hike was the state of Mzimkhulwana Hut. The rule of "what is carried in, must be carried out" was completely disregarded by previous hikers - bottles and other rubbish was strewn around the hut, a most uninviting welcome for any visitor. Please, respect the mountains and your fellow hikers - leave the caves and huts as you would like to find them.

Hiking is for each of us very much a personal journey. Some would say that there is something truly spiritual about being in the mountains, for others it is a chance to escape the monotony of everyday life and the chance to re-discover ones-self and still for others, the much coveted "me-time". Whatever the reason, it is a healthy and fun activity, one that can be enjoyed by both young and old alike. So what are you waiting for - grab your boots and get out there - there are mountains to be climbed and places to be explored and what better way to do that than with others who share your passion.

CELEBRATING NEW YEAR FROM AASVOELKRANS CAVE - 31 DEC 14 - 2 JAN 15

by Keith Ashton

This was the 10th time Margaret & I have celebrated New Year in this cave & this time we were joined by Sarah-Lynn & sister Amy-Lee, Alistair & Cathy, Carolee & Becky, Hettie & Margret Kirsten & Margaret Robberts - a few staying one night & but most staying 2 nights.



We set off in mist & rain after donning our gear but were in very good spirits as it is only about 5 km to the cave & we were all looking forward to our celebrations from a spectacular spot & we were able to carry extra goodies to help us celebrate, inc good food, even Christmas cake & lovely sweets & chocolate, beer, sparkling & other types of wine, sherry, brandy & liqueurs just to name a few - I weighed my pack at 19.5 kg which nearly included the kitchen sink.

Soon we crossed our first fast flowing stream but no problem over the small timber bridge, then a short climb before passing Kamloops Dam.

After the Dam (overflowing well) it was more uphill until we descended to the next fast flowing stream (same stream producing the large waterfall at the cave) - we were able to cross carefully in the mist & rain over the boulders without having to remove our boots.

Then it was onwards below the old look-out tower position (now demolished) towards the cave.

The steep stony & slippery track down to the bottom cave had to be negotiated carefully - this caused a bit of stress to Cathy (especially in these conditions) as she does not have a head for heights, but with a bit of help she bravely made it to the cave. We were all wet on arrival in the cave but soon took our wet gear off & made ourselves very comfortable - then soon it was lunch time - however after lunch the weather was still very misty & raining so relaxation, socialising & playing games was the order of the day before our evening celebrations which culminated with a rousing rendition of "Auld Lang Syne".



On New Years Day we were up very early & after breakfast with a few of our party getting packed up & ready for home, we all set off back up the steep track from the cave to re-trace our steps to the stream crossing & here we bid farewell to four of our group with the rest of us continuing off the beaten track towards Caracal Cave, the intention then being to have lunch there then drop down to the valley & return via Fulton Rock & the very steep climb back, followed by a route directly past the old look-out tower spot & back to Aasvoelkrans - this we did starting in mist but with the weather clearing after about an hour.

The photographs herewith illustrate our time in the caves & our explorations.

The third day we returned to Highmoor Office in glorious sunshine.

Thanks to all who participated in our hike & celebrations & for your comradeship.

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Discounts for Members

MBC members are offered discounted rates at the following outdoor gear outlets:

Tripper Sports: 23B Calder Road, Mayville, Durban. Phone 0312093649 Website: www.trippersports.com

The Kingfisher: 53 Hunter Street, Durban. Phone: 0313683903 (Ganny)

Flamingo Sales (Columbia gear): Contact Conrad Buchner Phone 0315395401 conrad@flamingosales.co.za

Cape Union Mart: www.capeunionmart.co.za/

SOCIAL CALENDAR – PLEASE NOTE THE VENUE

Directions to Sherwood Bowling Club - 860 Jan Smuts Highway.

From Durban - Take N3 out towards PMB, after Tollgate take the Sherwood off-ramp and turn right under the freeway in to Jan Smuts Highway, up the hill, past Jungle Nursery on the right, turn right under the pedestrian bridge into Tropical Nursery parking, follow the road past trees to the back of the nursery.

From Westville - take the M13 towards Durban, past Westwood Shopping centre, through 45th Cutting traffic lights, down Jan Smuts Highway, turn left under the pedestrian bridge (in front of Naked Ladies) in to Tropical Nursery parking, follow the road past trees to the back of nursery.

From PMB, from Hillcrest take the N3 past the Pavilion and four-level interchange, take the Sherwood glide-off, keep left in to Jan Smuts Highway, past Jungle Nursery on right, turn right under pedestrian bridge in to the parking of Tropical Nursery, follow road to the back of Tropical Nursery.

SOCIAL CALENDAR

The following MBC Socials will be held during the 2nd Quarter at the Sherwood Bowling Club, 7:00 for 7:30pm

DATE	DESCRIPTION
23 rd April	To be announced
14 th May	Guiding Selected Classic Climbs of the Swiss Alps. 2006, by Gavin Raubenheimer
28 th May	Cycling in France, presented by Sorin Dimitriu. With its idyllic country rides along tranquil canals, dramatic mountain climbs and a feel of the Tour de France, France offers a wealth of great cycling experiences. Starting and ending in Paris, we cycled for two weeks the picturesque routes of Burgundy and Jura provinces. Some of the country's most gorgeous and historically significant lands set the perfect scene for our tour, and two other French great passions -food and wine- came together.
11 th June	Adventures in Botswana, by Tanya Hall. Gaborone to Maun and the Delta.... luxury to bushveld camping, combo of everything
25 th June	New MBC members evening, convened by Sorin Dimitriu. This is an event dedicated to all new members signed with MBC in the last 18 months. Older club members and hike leaders will like to meet you, share their experiences and passion with you. All new and old members are invited.