



MOUNTAIN BACKPACKERS CLUB

Fixture List: April - June 2010

CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER

Dear Members

Before I tell you about all the exciting happenings in the club, I'd first like us to turn our thoughts to Piet Smit, and his family. They've currently been through a bit of a scare. Piet recently had a small stroke, however the doctors at Westville Hospital have taken great care of him and he's recovering, with loving friends and family around him. Piet is our ever faithful Quartermaster, and we are so very lucky to have someone like him at the service of this club. He usually appears from the undergrowth of his garden, and greets one with a huge smile, and a welcoming hand. Piet, the Mountain Backpackers club wish you a speedy recovery.

As you may know Dave Gay has decided to move on from the committee, and therefore the committee has decided to recognize him with gratitude for the huge effort he made in developing and successfully implementing our club website. He also served on the Executive Committee as Backpacking Convener from 2006 until 2010 and continues to lead hikes for the club. Therefore we've added Dave to the MBC Honor Roll displayed on our website. Thank you Dave.

Jovita da Silva has also decided to leave the committee at the end of the year. She has been terrific, ensuring that our membership records are kept up to date and you receive your membership cards on time. I've often received club emails at 1 and 2am replying to new members, etc. Jovita's enthusiasm will be missed on the committee, and therefore we will be looking for someone to join the us and fill Jovita's shoes. So please give it some thought, and if you'd like to be part of the driving force of MBC and help steer this ship, please chat to one of the committee members.

This year's committee is looking at how we can best serve our leaders and in this regard Gary Sharpe and Bobby Stanton are setting up some exciting training, spanning the rest of this year. Leader training is so very important as was evident this last weekend when some adventurous souls and myself tackled Redi Peak. The mist rolled in and after a short while trying to find Buttress Pass we decided to go back to Redi Pass. At this point John Pickup used his rope skills to set up a hand line down a tricky section. These skills were invaluable on the hike and therefore proved how important leader training is.

The club campout is in a few days and we've had a fantastic response, so I'll tell you about it in the next Chairman's Chatter.

See you in our Mountains soon
Grant Wilkinson
MBC Chairman

MOUNTAIN BACKPACKERS CLUB COMMITTEE

Chairman:	Grant Wilkinson	073 6168789
Vice Chairman:	Bobby Stanton	031 4655535
Treasurer:	Bobby Stanton (temporary)	073 2795289
Fixture List / Magazine:	Bobby Stanton	031 4655535
Membership / Subscriptions:	Jovita da Silva	082 6919180
Backpacking / Day Hikes Convener:	Eddie von Bargaen	083 2811288
Socials / Pro	Joanna Hall	083 6500914

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

Jeff Sandwith and family Allan Fabian Jorene Nel Kevin Seivewright Sheila Sayer Kylie Reardon Anita Nelson-Esch Jack Emerton Sagraan Perumal Kristie-Leigh Cay Craig Handler Peter Buys and family Peter & Tonia Woodburn Adrian Chandler and family Ansu Human and family Gina McCulloch	Kim Baillie Jason Boutelje Bronwyn Campbell Jonathan Marsden and family Rachel Engelbrecht Kashmir Singh and family Johan Vermeulen and family Ash Sewdwari and family Anette Clement Garth Jones and family Quintin Bezuidenhout Rolan and Jo-Anne Fryer and family Geoff Harris Natalie Way-Jones and family Karen Petersen and family
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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.

FAMILY MEMBERS

You now able to have your own profile in the club membership database. Previously you were grouped together e.g. Mr & Mrs J Bond & Family with membership number 007. Now the family member who actually pays the subs is the Principal Member 007.1, and the rest of the family are Family Members 007.2 etc. Not all of you are on the new database - I simply did not have the names available when the import to the new system was done.

By being listed individually you are be able to:

- have your own membership number and membership card
- have a record of your hikes on the electronic hiking log on the website.
- have your own access to the website, submit stories, photos and participate in discussion forums.

Please let me know your details so that I can create a separate profile for each Family Member.

**Many thanks
Jovita da Silva
Membership Porfolio**

April 2010

Date	Description	Distance Height	Leader	Contact	Grade
3	Easter Saturday Champagne Braai Brunch at Springside Nature Reserve, Hillcrest. enjoyable easy walk through grassland, indigenous forest & pools. all the family welcome. Meet at the Springside reserve for a 8am start. BYO braai brunch & champagne!	4 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	1
2 - 5	Sentinel to Cathedral Peak in 4 Days. (Northern Drakensberg escarpment) Day 1 Sentinel car park to Madonna and her Worshippers Day 2 Madonna to Mweni Day 3 Mweni to Twins cave Day 4 Twins cave to Cathedral Peak via the Bell Traverse	52 km 1200 m	Grant Wilkinson	073 6168789	4-5
2 - 5	Pitsaneng Pass to Umzimkhulu Pass (Garden Castle area) via Wilson's Cave and Sandleni Cave, returning via Fun Cave.	47 km 1350 m	Dave Gay	031 7654246 (18h00 to 20h00 Mon-Thu only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	4-5
10	Mpiti & Porcupine Falls. Hike upriver from Kloof picnic site to see both waterfalls. Meet for a 2pm start. Costs: R15 per person reserve fee.	8 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 6211687 a/h 031 702 9138	1
11	Joint Ramblers hike. Hilton Ramble around Hilton College estate with a magnificent view of the Umgeni valley and down to Gwen Falls. Meet in Pinetown at 7.30am or at Hilton College at 8.30 am Petrol sharing costs R45		Colin Turner	031 7083517	
10-11	Beach hike from Munster to Port Edward and back (14 km). Bring and braai Saturday night. Sunday: Fish Eagle Trail at Umtamvuna (12 km).	26 km	Sharon Jordan	083 6563231	2
10-11	Strenuous all day hike up Tsepeng Pass and down Wilson's Pass from Hermit's Wood campsite. (Garden Castle area) Arrive Friday evening; leave Sunday morning.	24 km 1410 m	Dave Gay	031 7654246 (18h00 to 20h00 Mon-Thu only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	4

17	Kloof Gorge. Come down Kloof Gorge and along the Molweni river to the base of Kloof Falls. Meet at Krantzkloof Picnic site for a 2pm start. Cost: R15 per person reserve fee.	7 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	2
18	Joint Ramblers hike. Shongweni/Summerveld Circuit. Medium hike which starts at the Castle in the valley, with a steep but rewarding climb to Summerveld to start the day and back down through the forest at the end. R15 Petrol sharing costs.		Jon Stevens	082 4591522	
17-18	Gxalingenwa Cave via Emerald Stream and Pinnacle Rock, returning via Giant's Cup Trail (Cobham area).	28 km 450 m	Clive Powell	031 564 6169 after 19h00	3
16-18	Monks Cowl / Champagne Castle area - Dragon Peaks Mountain Resort - Camping Weekend. Day hikes from the campsite. Nice campsites with electric points, good ablutions with hot showers, etc. magnificent views of Champagne Castle, Cathkin Peak & Sterkhorn, etc. Swimming pools, childrens slides, swings & adventure playground at the resort as well as a bar & restaurant. Unlimited beautiful hikes from this base or just chill out. Please contact Keith by 26 March if you want him to book you a place. Camping R90 pppn, pensioner discount (over 60) 50% = R45 pppn. Chalets also available.	8 km	Keith Ashton	033 2395023	2
19Apr - 1May	Grand Traverse 2010. Sentinel car park to Bushman's Nek.	230 km 10 000m	John Pickup	072 1512031	5
24	Longshadows Trail, Kloof. Hike upriver in the Krantzkloof reserve to the escarpment, and down again. Meet at Krantzkloof picnic site for a 2pm start. R15 per person reserve fee.	8 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	2
25	An Exploration and meander of the Summerveld Reserve. Meeting at Stokers at 08h30 or at the Summerveld country Lodge at 09h00. The lodge has meals and drinks for fellowship afterwards. If the water is not too cold there is a chance to swim.	12 km 100 m	Gary Sharpe	031 764 5334 072 902 4899	2
23-25	Klipspringer Trail, Augrabies Falls National Park, Northern Cape Province. 3-day backpacking trail. Physical fitness essential. Overnight accommodation in huts. Cost: R160 pp (3 days, 2 nights). Payment secures booking. Accommodation can be arranged for before and after the trail at an additional cost. This trail can be done on its own, or combine it with the Orange River Paddling / Rafting Adventure.	40 km	Anitha Jaipal	031 2665207 082 4568739 aj@ProfPM.com	3
24-25	Day Hikes from Mountain Shadows Resort, Kamberg. Book your accomodation direct (tel: 033 2677493) or if tenting call or sms Arthur directly. This is a beautiful area.	14 km 300 m	Arthur Bester	083 482 3590	3
24-25	Grand Traverse Re-supply: Camp at the top of Bannerman Pass with the GT party, and return via Langalibalele Pass. (Giants Castle area) This is a 4-day long weekend so other options may be available if there is a demand. Please make a commitment now by booking with the leader!	28 km 1520 m	Dave Gay	031 7654246 (18h00 to 20h00 Mon-Thu only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	4-5

24-25	Day hike to Thabana Ntlenyana from Sani Top. Overnight at Sani Top Backpackers.	30 km 750m	David Honour	082 9064875	3
26Apr - 1May	Orange River Paddling / Rafting Adventure. 4-day, 5-night river trip. Price R3035 per adult (includes boats, equipment, qualified guides, all meals, camping, transport back to base camp). You do not need to be a great swimmer but a reasonable level of fitness is recommended. A 25% non-refundable deposit is required to secure your booking, so if you don't want to miss out on this adventure, book early. This trip is definitely going ahead. We already have a confirmed group of 12 people. 4 more places are available. Itinerary: Day 1 – Arrive at Fiddlers Creek Base Camp. Trip briefing. Dinner. Day 2 - Breakfast, safety briefing, gentle paddle downstream. Lunch en route. Camping and dinner on the river bank. Days 3 & 4 – Breakfast, then on the river. Lunch en route, camp on the riverbank, dinner. Day 5 – Breakfast, then on the river. Lunch en route, camp at Fiddlers Creek Base Camp, dinner. Day 6 – Breakfast, then pack for home - or the next destination! This trip can be done on its own, or combine it with the Klipspringer Trail.		Anitha Jaipal	031 2665207 082 4568739 aj@ProfPM.com	
28Apr - 1May	Olifants River Back-Pack Trail. This trail offers an intimate glimpse of the Kruger Park which few have the privilege to see. It stretches over 4 days and 3 nights and covers approximately 42 km. It will be led by two armed game rangers. A degree of fitness is required as you will need to carry a tent plus all your own food. The cost is R1753 pp plus R35 p/day conservation fee. Numbers are limited to 8, so hurry and reserve your place now! A deposit is required to secure your booking.	42 km	Marie von Bargaen	082 5027072 marie.nicholas@spar.co.za	3

May 2010

Date	Description	Distance Height	Leader	Contact	Grade
1	Training Course conducted by Gavin Raubenheimer. Topic: Rescue and Emergency Procedures. Venue: Spirit of Adventure, Shongweni. See directions at the end of the magazine. Cost: R20 per club member. Compulsory for all prospective new leaders.		Gavin Raubenheimer	Contact: Gavin 033 3433168 / 082 9905876 or Bobby Stanton 031 4655535 / 084 4655535	
1	Palmiet Nature Reserve, Westville. Walk through beautiful scenery to the Cascades waterfall. Leaving at 2pm.	7 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	1
2	Joint Ramblers hike. Ashburton- new hike with Francois Marais, Meet in Pinetown or at the Ashburton Off Ramp above the N3 at 8.30 am. Drinks afterwards. Petrol sharing costs R35.		Contact Jenny who is co-ordinating	084 9520622	
1-2	Visit the sulphur spring from Bird's Nest Cave (Vergelegen area).	30 km 600 m	Dave Gay	031 7654246 (18h00 to 20h00 Mon-Thu only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	3-4
8	Kloof Beacon. Hike downriver and up Kloof Gorge to the survey beacon on top of the	8 km	Linda Marsden-	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	2

	escarpment. Meet at the Krantzkloof Picnic site, Kloof Falls Road for a 2pm start. R15 per person reserve fee.		King		
9	Joint Ramblers hike. Camelot in the Cato Ridge area – a moderate hike.		Jon Stevens	082 4591522	
9	Hike through grassland , indigenous forest & plantations. Hikers to meet Leader at Byrne Church adjacent to turn off to Oaks Hotel. R10.00 pp donation to farmer	12 km 150 m	David Tighe	031 4649033 076 0280708	3
8-9	Hike to Centenary Hut from Injasuti , return via Cloudland Col and the old Field Rangers lookout station.	21 km 940 m	Elaine Bushell	031 7675414 (18h00-20h00) elaine.bushell@maccaferri.co.za	3
15	Mpiti and Porcupine Falls. Hike upriver from kloof picnic site to see both waterfalls. Meet for a 2pm start. R15 per person reserve fee.	6 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	2
16	Joint Ramblers beach hike Umdloti to Umhlanga and back, followed by optional lunch at the Bush Tavern. Meet at car park outside the Bush Tavern at 8.30 am.		Peter Brazier	083 6612545 031 7055645	
15-16	Zulu Cave via Eagle Gorge , Eagle Cave and Cat Cave, returning via Intunja Peak (Monks Cowl area).	28 KM 765 M	Dave Gay	031 7654246 (18h00 to 20h00 Mon-Thu only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	3-4
22	Springside Nature Reserve , Hillcrest. Enjoyable walk through grassland, indigenous forest and pools. The whole family is welcome on this easy walk. Meet at Springside reserve for a 2pm start. BYO braai.	4 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	1
23	Summerveld area. This is a joint backpackers / ramblers day hike through the Summerveld area. Meet Gary at Stokers at 08h30.	8 km	Gary Sharpe	072 902 4899	1
23	Fascinating Sunday morning walk in Phezulu Game Park (Valley of 1000 Hills) where you can see: Blesbok, Impala, Wildebeest, Zebra, Giraffe, Caracal, Bush Buck, Duiker, Bush Pig. R20.00 per person. Restaurant on the premises for tea and scones or something more.		Sharon Jordan	e-mail if possible - wildcoast@telkomsa.net 083 656 3231	1
22-23	Climb Rhino Horn from the Annex Cave, in the Garden Castle area.	18 km 1160 m	Clive Powell	031 564 6169 after 19h00	3-4
22-23	McKenzie's Cave , returning via Cyprus Cave. (Mkhomazi area)	23 km 705 m	Dave Gay	031 7654246 (18h00 to 20h00 Mon-Thu only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	3-4
29	Kloof Gorge. Hike down Kloof Gorge and along the Molweni River to the base of Kloof Falls. meet at Krantzkloof picnic site for a 2pm start. R15 per person reserve fee required.	2 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	2
30	Day hike at Tala Valley farm.	10 km 300 m	David Honour	082 9064875	3
29-30	Climb Sterkhorn. Join Arthur on a memorable trip up Sterkhorn, in the Monks Cowl area. Tenting at Blindmans Corner at the base of Sterkhorn. SMS or call Arthur to book your place on this hike.	14 km 800 m	Arthur Bester	083 482 3590	4
29-30	Hike to Bushman's Cave. Return via Ngwangwane Pass and Thamathu Pass. Young members encouraged to join.	24 km 750 m	Grant Wilkinson	073 6168789	3

June 2010

Date	Description	Distance Height	Leader	Contact	Grade
5	Training Course conducted by Gavin Raubenheimer. Topic: Basic snow techniques and equipment (required for the Advanced Mountain Leader Course). Venue: Spirit of Adventure, Shongweni. See directions at the end of the magazine. Cost: R20 per club member. Compulsory for all prospective new leaders		Gavin Raubenheimer	Contact: Gavin 033 3433168 / 082 9905876 or Bobby Stanton 031 4655535 / 084 4655535	
5	Longshadows Trail, Kloof. Hike upriver in the Krantskloof Nature Reserve to the escarpment and down. Meet at the picnic site for a 2pm start. A reserve fee of R15 is required.	8 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	2
6	Eston area - new hike on a farm past the Tala Game Reserve. Petrol sharing costs R35.		Margie Forbes	073 4376915	
5-6	Backpacking to and overnight in Gxalingenwa Cave (Cobham area). This is a beautiful hike and will mostly be circular route via part of the Giants Cup trail, visiting Ngwenya Pool, Pinnacle Rock, and Emerald Stream.	28 km 600 m	Keith Ashton	033 2395023	3
5-6	Climb Cathedral Peak from Sherman's Cave.	17 km 1555 m	Dave Gay	031 7654246 (18h00 to 20h00 Mon-Thu only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	4
12	Palmiet Nature Reserve, Westville. Walk through beautiful scenery to the Cascades Waterfall. Meet at the Village Market Carpark opposite the Westville Hotel, for a 2pm start.	5 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	1
13	Joint Ramblers hike to Killarney Rockery at Cato Ridge. This is a moderate hike with beautiful rock formations. Fantastic viewing of aloes. 12 kms. R15 donation to the conservancy		Jon Stevens	082 4591522	
12-13	Whytes Cave via Hidden Valley. Exploring the shortcut near Rob's Cave (Garden Castle area).	25 km 900 m	Bobby Stanton	031 4655535 084 4655535	3-4
12-13	Tenting trip to explore Venice Cave from Cobham	25 km 400 m	Grant Wilkinson	073 6168789	4
14-18	Umfoloji Wilderness Explorer Trail. Join us for this exciting game viewing trail in the Umfolozi / Hluhluwe Game Reserve with fun evenings around a campfire, under the beautiful African night sky. Itinerary: Day 1 - Arrive at base camp, day hike, sleep at base camp. Day 2 - Hike with your gear to a remote bush location Day 3 - Hike with your gear to a remote bush location. Day 4 - Hike with your gear back to base camp, sleep at base camp. Day 5 - Morning walk from base camp. A distance of 15 to 20 km is covered per day. Cost is R2750 pp – all inclusive (5 days hiking, 4 nights accommodation, meals, overnight hiking gear). Minimum 4, maximum 8 persons.	80 km	Anitha Jaipal	031 2665207 082 4568739 aj@ProfPM.com	3

	Payment due by 20 Feb. 2010. Accommodation can be arranged for before (Mpila R240 pp – 4 bed rondavel) and after the trail (Hilltop R300 pp – 2 bed rondavel), but we need to book early.				
16-20	Southern Berg Traverse: Phinong Pass to Sehlabathebe Lodge via Sani Top Backpackers Lodge, Sandleni Cave and Mzimude Cave. Payment of R300 for hutted accommodation confirms your booking.	68 km 900 m	Dave Gay	031 7654246 (18h00 to 20h00 Mon-Thu only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	5
19	Kloof Beacon. Hike downriver and up Kloof Gorge to the survey beacon on top of the escarpment. Meet at the picnic site for a 2pm start. R15 reserve fee required per person.	8 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	2
23Jun-10 Jul	Tour du Mont Blanc: 14 days encircling the Mont Blanc massif and hiking through the French, Swiss and Italian Alps.	190 km lots of m	Andrew Friedemann	031 7672160 info@wildwaysadventures.co.za	4
26	Mpiti and Porcupine Falls. Hike upriver from Kloof Falls picnic site to see both waterfalls. we leave at 2pm. R15 referve fee required per person.	6 km	Linda Marsden-King	083 621 1687 a/h 031 702 9138	1
27	Day hike at Tala Valley Farm.	10 km 300 m	David Honour	082 9064875	3
26-27	Day Hikes from Mountain Shadows Resort, Kamberg. You can book directly (tel: 033 2677493) alternatively SMS or call Arthur. This is a stunning area to hike in.	14 km 300 m	Arthur Bester	083 482 3590	3

Advance Notices

Date	Description	Leader	Phone
14 Aug	Training Course conducted by Gavin Raubenheimer. Topic: Understanding maps and compasses. Venue: Spirit of Adventure, Shongweni. See directions at the end of the magazine. Cost: R20 per club member. Compulsory for all prospective new leaders	Gavin Raubenheimer	Contact: Gavin 033 3433168 / 082 9905876 or Bobby Stanton 031 4655535 / 084 4655535
11 Sep	Training Course conducted by Gavin Raubenheimer. Topic: Movement on steep ground. Venue: Spirit of Adventure, Shongweni. See directions at the end of the magazine. Cost: R20 per club member. Compulsory for all prospective new leaders.	Gavin Raubenheimer	Contact: Gavin 033 3433168 / 082 9905876 or Bobby Stanton 031 4655535 / 084 4655535
6 Nov	Training Course conducted by Gavin Raubenheimer. Topic: Technical clothing and equipment. Venue: Spirit of Adventure, Shongweni. See directions at the end of the magazine. Cost: R20 per club member. Compulsory for all prospective new leaders.	Gavin Raubenheimer	Contact: Gavin 033 3433168 / 082 9905876 or Bobby Stanton 031 4655535 / 084 4655535

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.

The following articles and/or stories are also available on the club website at www.mountainbackpackers.co.za

Mweni Guides

Some of you may have heard of the efforts being made by club members to collect hiking equipment in support of the Mweni Guides. The Guides are a group from the Mweni Cultural Centre who offer guiding services in to this area of the Berg. Here is a short note from John Pickup who is leading the effort:

Thank you very much for the kind donation of clothing, and backpacking gear which was handed over to Agrippa and the Guides at the Mweni Cultural Centre.

There were huge smiles all around and it was a good feeling to see how much they appreciated the goods and before we had left they were trying on the boots and putting up the tent to see how many could sleep in it.

If you have not yet hiked in the Mweni Area I urge you to consider doing so, as not only are the Mountains spectacular but the villagers very welcoming. Plenty of shops close to the Cultural Centre selling cokes and essentials. As one of the group members commented as the hike was coming to an end "it is like trekking through Africa."

Please continue to let me know if you have any gear or clothing that you no longer need, for the people, and I shall make arrangements for collection.

Regards

John Pickup

In January of this year club member Carlos Gonzalez and Christine Harris joined the record breakers and other masochists in attempting a record time for the Grand Traverse of the Drakensberg. They finished the 217 kilometers in 4 days, 14 hours and 57 minutes. Here is Carlos' story.

Dates: 06/01/2010 – 10/01/2010

Participants: Christine Harris (51)
Carlos Gonzalez (36)

Preparation:

Last December 15th I got a phone call from Christine Harris. She had heard of me through a common friend of ours. She told me that she wanted to beat the women's record time for the Grand Traverse and was looking for someone to go with her. Was I keen? I said that I was but I regretted saying so when she told me she was wanted to do it as soon as possible. I hadn't done any training and certainly wasn't ready for it. However, I couldn't help myself besides how often does a challenging offer like that fall on your plate? The only point that was in my favour was that I knew the route from the Traverse I completed with Mountain Backpackers in April last year and more recently in December, a group of us had, had to bail out of a 'unsupported 9-day Grand Traverse attempt due to bad weather.

Leaving me no time to reconsider, Christine explained the route she had in mind (a 2007 Andrew Porter's attempt) and discussed logistics. I had committed and there was really no turning back even though I felt that I had bitten off more than I could chew. The 5th of January was our start day, the weather was looking good and we had daylight on our side.

My last minute prep involved a quick and expensive trip to Cesar's from Bush&Bundu: a 750g +5°C sleeping bag, a pair of shiny red Salomon XT Wings trail-running shoes, an expensive light raincoat and a cheap light closed-cell sleeping pad.

As we were planning to break a record and do the Traverse in 4 or 5 days, every extra gram counted. We had decided to take no tent, stove, fuel and cooking pots. Food was my priority; I packed for 6

days and still never managed to get the weight of my backpack below 19kg. Christine managed to keep hers to around 15kg.

Day 1 – Easter Cave (45km, 13h 30')

We were driven to a misty Sentinel Car Park on Tuesday January 5th. Was the weather forecast wrong? That night I tried to get some sleep but Christine was too nervous and by 2:30am she was already fiddling around. She wouldn't sleep for the following 4 nights. At 4am we left with the aid of our headlamps. That was it, the challenge had started. To our relief it was a starry dawn, a good omen. We were in high spirits and our backpacks didn't feel that heavy...YET.

We walked fast. It felt good. At 6:30am we summited Mount-Aux-Sources, had a quick break and carried on. The route that we had chosen would take us along the back valleys of Lesotho. This was about doing the traverse short and fast, not about scenery. As I was the navigator, I would walk in front trying to look at my GPS without falling or twisting an ankle while eating the snacks that filled up the pockets of my pants. This was unknown territory for me and I had no idea where we were. No time to look at the map. When I thought we were on the ridgeline that surrounds the Mnweni Cutback we would suddenly descend and realise that we hadn't walked that far but we were actually in the valley behind Fangs and Rwanqa Passes. The hours went by quickly, ridge after ridge, valley after valley. We arrived at Easter Cave, our goal for the day, at 5:30pm. The weather was good and there were still a couple of hours of daylight left. We could have carried on walking but we didn't want to kill ourselves on the first day and the cave was too tempting a shelter.

I personally was quite happy to stop. My body was aching everywhere. My feet were burning. I had serious doubts I could finish at this pace. Christine on the other hand looked as if she had been for a stroll in the park and was so determined to do this that I felt guilty about telling her my doubts.

Day 2 – an overhang south of Ship's Prow (39km, 14h)

After a good night sleep I felt much better in the morning.

It was decided that we would start our days at 4:30am from now on once we had first daylight. It was pointless starting any earlier with in the darkness, as the going is much slower, besides the risk of injuring yourself.

We took it a little bit easier. The climbs felt much harder, the backpacks much heavier. Perhaps we had pushed it a little bit too much the day before. We went past the Mlabonja Pass over the ridge past the Elephant, down again past Cockade and Tseketseke Pass. Cleft Peak felt harder than ever. Whenever I had a look at distance covered in my GPS it was a disappointment. I made a mental effort not to look at it again.

The Tlanyaku Valley was welcome sight. It was a pleasure to walk on a path on flat terrain at a steady pace. Then it was the long climb to the unending ridgeline (but great for fast progress too) that would take us all the way to Champagne Castle.

Thunderstorms clouds had been building up for most of the day and it was a matter of time before the storm would finally descend on us. We heard the first thunder when we were half the way the ridgeline. It wasn't the best place to be. The first drops fell at 2:30pm which soon turned into hail. Lightning was striking closer and closer. There was no place to shelter so we just carried in hope that it would pass or miss us. By 3pm we were completely soaked in. The weather was getting worse and worse. It was clearly very unsafe as the lightening ricocheted past us so we made a beeline for the first rock band which had little of overhang that we could find and waited there for an hour. The temperature had plummeted and we were both rather miserable as we shivered uncontrollably.

At the first sign of improvement we dashed out, but it was all in vain as the rain started to pour down again. I I wracked my brain and eventually remembered a fine shelter south of Ship's Prow Pass where we could spend a presumably comfortable night. The thought of being there out of the rain was an incentive to move as fast as we could to our 'haven'. On reaching the top of Champagne Castle by 6pm, we felt restored and eagerly descended to look for our palace. By 6:45pm our ordeal was

over – we had survived the hail and lightning storm and miraculously had a comfortable night indeed.

Day 3 – an overhang north of Giant's Castle (35km, 13h 15')

Christine was up at 3am. She was starting to suffer from blisters and was busy strapping her feet, a job that seemed to take ages. My feet were surprisingly coping well and I was feeling strong. The sky was clear blue and I was eager to get going, that said a few hours later I wasn't feeling so enthusiastic.

Our goal for the day was to leave behind Giants Castle and sleep somewhere in the Mokhotlong Valley. However, it wasn't to happen.

At 9am, 13km and 4 hours later, we were on top of Mafadi. There was a thick layer of clouds over KZN that seemed to be growing over the time. Some sections of the escarpment ahead were already being covered. The route on our GPS, and the one that I also knew, would keep us close to the escarpment. It was a mistake. We would soon be in a whiteout, our pace reduced to a crawl. In retrospect, we should have followed Andrew Hagen and Stijn Laenen's route, down Mahlabachaneng Valley and up the Jarateng Valley. Away from the escarpment in Lesotho, the weather would have been much drier and would have saved us a great deal of climbing. Between the Popple and Bannerman's Face we couldn't see a thing. By midday we were once again in the middle of serious thunderstorm activity. Things were once again not looking good. Fortunately, once we were over the ridge heading down to Langalibalele River the weather gave us a break and we somehow managed to get away without a drop on us. Then it was the gruelling climb over Mount Durnford from we got our first sight of the Giant's Castle, still miles away.

As we were half the way the final ridge before climbing to Giants, when the weather looked the most promising, a thick layer of stormy clouds arrived from the South. The rain came fast, without warning. Having in mind the afternoon of the day before, I promptly took out my ground sheet and put it over us to prevent us from getting wet and sit it out. After 1 hour the weather didn't seem to improve. We didn't know whether to go ahead or to retrace our steps to the little shelter we had passed 500m back. We were so close from the top of the ridge and Giants didn't seem far either. At 5:30pm, when the weather gave us a short break, we decided we'd better go back for the shelter. We were still dry and that was the most important thing. It was a good call. By the time we were under cover the weather was on us again.

The shelter was deep enough but there was lots of seepage from the roof. The only dry area was a tiny, sloping corner. We made ourselves as comfortable as we could and prepared ourselves for a difficult night.

It was probably the worst night I've spent in the mountains. There was virtually no space as we were forced to cram ourselves into the corner. The good thing was that it kept us warm even though we fought a continuous battle of slipping down to the wet areas. The rain went on and on and our sleeping bags got completely soaked. We eventually had to get into our survival bags. Condensation inside built up quickly but at least we were warm. Sleeping was out of question. Things weren't looking too promising.

Day 4 – a stream north of Sandleni Buttress (56km, 19h 15')

At dawn we were completely surprised to see that the sky was full of stars again. It was such a relief. We couldn't wait to get out of the dingy and dank hole. At 3:30am Christine started the endless process of getting ready. Her poor feet looked excruciating. Some of the blisters had started to bleed. She spent a good 45 minutes bandaging and wrapping her feet for the next assault.

We were ready to go at 5:15am; 15 minutes later we were on the ridge we had tried to get over to the day before. We could see we had made the right decision the day before. Giant's was still so far away. We would have been in a serious situation if we had decided to push on.

We hid our backpacks by Giants Castle Pass. It was such a treat to walk with no load. We made the peak just before 7am. Phone calls were made back home. It was encouraging to hear familiar voices that were caring for us. The key moment was when I got a positive weather forecast for the next 2 days. It was a huge moral boost not to have to worry about the weather any more.

In high spirits we went down, put on our backpacks and headed out towards the Mokhotlong Valley. Once we were in the paths we flew for the next 2 hours. So much that when I looked at the GPS again I realised we had gone too far and that we should have left the Mokhotlong Valley towards the Tsolo Valey a little earlier. It cost us 2km extra which is a lot when you are racing against time and have bleeding strapped up feet!

At the point where we crossed the Mokhotlong River we had a long 50-minutes stop. Christine's feet were getting worse and needed some attention. I couldn't believe she had made it that far in such state. And she never complained. She actually was getting irritated at the fact that we were losing such precious time. She wanted to finish this so badly!

When we started the climb to Thebana-Ntlenyana it was 1:30pm and we were at 2670m. The peak was somewhere out there more than 800m above us. It was the biggest climb of the hike. We knew that from the top we could smell home and that was enough encouragement for us. Up and up we went, first following the Tsolo Valley then climbing an eternal ridge. We made the top by 5:30m after 7.5 km and 4 h ascent. I was worried for Christine and her feet as she had slowed down remarkably. But in fact there was nothing to worry about. This was no ordinary woman. I waited for her at the top. When she arrived she didn't want to stop for a break. It was a beautiful evening and she announced she wanted to push it through the night and catch up with some distance lost during the previous days. The thought of finishing the day after was very alluring and in order to make it we needed to keep on walking for a few more hours. We ended up walking for 20km and 7h more non-stop.

By the time we were about to enter the Sani flats it was pitch black. These two little lights made their way among a cacophony of Sotho voices and barking dogs. The flats went forever. We didn't seem to move. At 11pm we were finally leaving the Sani Flats behind to climb over the next ridge. Here Christine showed she was human too and pleaded for a break. She was not surprisingly feeling dizzy and a little wobbly too. She ate some snacks and 10 minutes was ready to go.

We wouldn't go much further. After the ridge, at the first stream we came across, we stopped to refill our bottles. It was now past midnight. I had in mind to make it all the way to Sandleni Cave. This was still 5Km away and considering there weren't many hours left before sunrise we decided to camp at this great little spot. It was a beautiful night and the grass was dry. What luck!! I had 3 wonderful hours sleep. As I was falling sleep I could hear Christine muttering "I don't know what I'm going to do with my feet tomorrow"

Day 5 – Bushman's' Nek Border Post (43km, 14h 15')

At 3:30am the alarm went off again. I was excited. This could be our last day!

At 4:30am I was ready to go but Christine was in the middle of her endless packing and binding her feet. Miraculously we finally took off on time, by 5! I could count the ridges left: Sandleni, No Man, Verkyker, Mashai and Walker's. It didn't sound too many. It was another fantastic morning and the weather forecast was good for the rest of the day. We didn't want to count our chickens yet but home looked so close now!

In this part of the berg the valleys are big, broad and shallow, the ridges far apart. It didn't make it easier to see where we were going. We didn't talk much; we just kept our heads down and walked and walked and walked, slowly but steadily.

We made our last phone call home from Mashai. It was 11:30am. We could see Walker's Peak right in front of us. In my mind Bushman's Nek was round the corner.

We went around Walker's Peak and descended towards the Tomathu Valley that runs behind Thaba-Ngwangwe. I was mentally prepared for this downhill. I didn't want to go down Isicatula Pass again so I had decided to try this more standard route down into the valley. Although longer it proved to be a good decision.

In my head everything was over once we were in the valley. The last of the big ridges had been done and sure the rest was a pitch and putt. Of course, it was mistake and I let my body relax too soon. There was still some distance to cover (16km). Thaba-Ngwangwe was bigger than ever and to go around it took us forever. And then it was the final Tomathu Ridge. Not having done it before I wasn't prepared for one of the worst paths I've seen in the Drakensberg. The last 9km were torturous. My feet were now in agony too and one of my ankles started to hurt. Not even the sight of Bushman's Nek Camp at the bottom of the valley cheered us up.

Finally, at 7pm, this epic and crazy adventure came to an end. I didn't feel elated, not even relieved. I was so exhausted that I could express nothing. I had nothing left. On the other hand, Christine was so chuffed! She was on such high! You could tell she was the happiest woman in the world. Although I didn't have any energy to express it I was so happy for her. I felt big respect for her, for her physical and mental strength. Those feet showed she was made of a different material.

The Ezemvelo guys let us have the sweetest shower ever. Once in the car I fell into a fitful sleep.

Conclusion

Having been through these days you know the mistakes you've made and what you could have done better. There's nothing new here. But here are a few simple pointers:

- Train, condition your body: You'll never feel you've trained enough but the better prepared you are the more the chances of success and less risk of injuries. One week later I'm still nursing a sprain ankle.
- Weather: The better the weather the higher the chances of success. Look at that forecast and be lucky.
- Equipment: Go light but go safe. I've worked out I carried 3.5 kg extra food but, of course, we were providing for 6 days. With 19kg I was way too heavy. It saved me that I had done lots of backpacking during the year
- Route: We definitely didn't follow the easiest route. We could have been faster if we had chosen for example Andrew Hagen and Stijn Laenen's route. And I believe you can still make it easier. Spend time looking at that map. The less you have to look at the GPS the faster.

Stats

Total time: 4 days, 14 hours and 57 minutes

Day...To.....	Time Start..	Time finished...	Distance....	Time....	Ascent...Descent....	Balance
.1.....Easter Cave.....	04:02.....	17:40.....	45.....	13h 43'.....	1765.....1381.....	384
.2.....Ships Prow Shelter.....	04:47.....	19:01.....	39.....	14h 01'.....	1865.....1602.....	263
.3.....Giants Castle Shelter.....	04:57.....	18:13.....	35.....	13h 15'.....	1749.....1779.....	-30
.4.....Hodgson's Peaks Stream.....	05:08.....	00:22.....	56.....	19h 14'.....	2267.....2533.....	-266
.5.....Bushman's Nek Border Post....	04:52.....	19:07.....	42.....	14h 15'.....	1455.....2580.....	-1125
.....Total.....			217.....	74h 28'.....	9101.....9875.....	-774

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Discounts For Members

CAPE UNION MART offers members 5% discount - **membership cards must be produced.**

OUTDOOR WAREHOUSE offers 5% discount when presented with **a valid membership card.**

BACKPACKING EQUIPMENT

In the past some members have not hiked because they did not have the necessary equipment, particularly winter gear. Our club has a full range of backpacking items, making it unique in KwaZulu-Natal. In addition to the backpacks and tents, there are sleeping bags, rain gear and gas stoves. Comfortable, warm jackets are for hire on club trips by MEMBERS only.

Hiring Fees

Deposit	Item	Daily Fee
R100	Tent	R20
R100	Backpack	R20
R50	Sleeping Bag + Liner	R10
R50	Gas Stove	R10
R50	Jacket	R10
R25	Mattress	R5
R25	Groundsheet	R5
R25	Poncho	R5

Example

For a weekend hike, to hire one backpack you will need to put down a R100 cash deposit. You will be charged R20 per day, so the hiring fee will be R40 provided you return the backpack by the end of the Wednesday following the hike. If you return the backpack on the Thursday you will be charged an additional R20. You will therefore be charged a total of R60, which will be taken from the deposit. The balance of R40 will be refunded to you in cash.

All arrangements regarding the hiring of Club equipment are to be made with **Piet Smit (Tel. 031-2662881)** and the items must be collected from / returned to him at **4 Bohmer Place (off Knoll Road, off Blair Atholl Road, Westville).**

Items must be checked (i.e. count pegs, poles etc.) and cleaned (i.e. wash inner sheet of sleeping bag). Tents, sleeping bags etc. are to be hung out and shaken before returning. If it has rained on the weekend, hang items out to dry as soon as possible after your hike.

EXCITING 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	
MBC Socials take place every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month at the Sherwood Bowling Club, 7:30 for 8:00pm Wors rolls or Hamburgers sold at the venue for R15 each.	
DATE	DESCRIPTION
8 April	Heidi Alcock – An intriguing look at Dassies, their changes in distribution and the effect on other wildlife. Heidi is a closet conservationist, trying to save humanity from itself. The study on the dassies was done by her mother-in-law (Mrs Joy Alcock) on their farm near Mhlopheni Nature Reserve (Between Grey Town and Muden), due to the dwindling population of dassies in that area and the resulting affect on the connected ecology, and how they are managing to fix the damage done.
22 April	Social Gathering at Waxi's, Westville Hotel, to drink to the GT'ers @ 7pm.
13 May	Christine Bro – a club member for many years will tell us about her trip to the Ruwenzori Mountains, to summit Margerita (5190 m) in Uganda and White Water Rafting along the Nile River.
27 May	Social Gathering at Stokers, Kloof @ 7pm
10 June	Dave Hall – Gliding over the Drakensberg, Pictures from the sky. Dave is a long time member of MBC and lover of the Drakensberg, who set a side his backpack to take up glider piloting, but the majesty of the Berg, drew him in again, this time from the air.
24 June	Alison Chadwick – Due to numerous requests, Alison has agreed to re-present the talk on her fascinating trip to Antarctica

DIRECTIONS TO SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE AT SHONGWENI DAM

FROM DURBAN ON M13:-

- Travel on **M13** up Field's Hill
- Take **EXIT 33** off ramp marked **Shongweni/Assagay**
- Left at top of off ramp into **KASSIER ROAD** – petrol station on left and polo grounds on right
- Cross bridge over N3 and travel **+/- 1 km**
- First left to **Shongweni Dam**
- Pass Denny Mushroom Farm on left
- First right to **Shongweni Dam**
- Travel along this road for **+/- 6km** through the sugar cane and the Shongweni Village until you reach the Reserve gates.

FROM DURBAN ON N3:-

- Travel on **N3** towards Pietermaritzburg
- Pass through **Mariannhill Toll Plaza**
- Travel for **6 km** then take **EXIT 32 Hillcrest/Assagay/Shongweni off ramp**
- Left at top of off ramp and travel **+/- 1 km**
- First left to **Shongweni Dam**
- Pass Denny Mushroom Farm on left
- First right to **Shongweni Dam**
- Travel along this road for **+/- 6 km** through the sugar cane and the Shongweni Village until you reach the Reserve gates.

FROM PIETERMARITZBURG ON N3:-

- Travel on N3 towards Durban
- **NB** – Be sure **NOT** to take the glide off to Hillcrest
- Take **EXIT 32** off ramp marked **Shongweni/Assagay**
- Right at top of off ramp, over bridge over N3 and travel **+/- 1 km**
- First left to **Shongweni Dam**
- Pass Denny Mushroom Farm on left
- First right to **Shongweni Dam**
- Travel along this road for **+/- 6km** through the sugar cane and the Shongweni Village until you reach the Reserve gates.

Note: There is a R35 entrance fee in to the Shongweni Reserve

