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P.O. Box 1063 . DURBAN 4000

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MAG. CONTRIBUTIONS

Due to the interesting and varied styles of contributions for the mag - too good for exclusions or edit cuts!! - The size of this month's publication has increased. Those of you who wish to contribute articles, constructive ideas, items of interest, hiking trail reports for future mag. publications please submit to:
Ramblers Mag. P.O. Box 1063 Durban 4000
Your interest and effort will be very much appreciated!!

CHANGE OF DURBAN DAY HIKE DEPARTURE POINT:

As from 7th August 1988 -
"Musgrave Park" (old Osborne Hotel) Corner of Musgrave Road/Berea Road, Durban

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Bill Brackenridge - Lyn Goodwin

HIRE OF TENTS AND EQUIPMENT

Tents and backpacks are stored in Winnie Jackson's garage in McArthur Street (near Albert Park) and may be hired for a nominal fee by phoning Winnie (3052515 H) or Rosemary (842522 H).
Remember: All equipment must be returned promptly.

THE BANKE AND KORANNA HIKING TRAILS

These two trails, the one three days the other 2 days are in the Marquard, Excelsior districts of the Eastern Free State. This area of the Free State has much to offer and challenge the hiker. The cave sandstone rock layer has been weathered through the ages by wind and water to form a landscape of isolated kopies, flat-topped grassy plateau with precipitous sides and plains and farmland between. These two trails traverse this typical Eastern Free State landscape and they have been laid out to create continually changing scenery. The steep wooded kloofs have many indigenous trees and shrubs, the foliage of which show wind vivid splashes of greens, browns and yellows against the sandstone cliffs. The accommodation is basic and varied from old farm-houses to renovated wattle and daub huts and one rock overhang. There were no bunks but mattresses are provided and there is water at each overnight stop. A more than moderate degree of fitness is required to complete most days in comfort. The paths are rough but generally well defined by white foot prints on rocks, posts etc. These may be difficult to find if the grass is long. As the trails are through farmlands there are many stiles to cross; one's agility at doing this becomes better each day.

We found the seven hour drive there very rewarding. My thanks to Rosemary, Margaret and Philip for being such good hiking companions.

Audrey Vickers

COLENZO HISTORICAL HIKE

I rode slowly into the western town of Colenso. The sun had gone, hours earlier. The moon appeared hazy, almost ethereal, bathing the low surrounding hills in a pale, wan, light. The stars glittered coldly, above the single deserted street, while the sidewalks remained hidden, in the shadows of the low fronted buildings. My breath hung in the air. The cold silence was invaded by a distant tinkle of piano and raucous laughter. A pool of light spilt from a nearby building, as two drunks lurched into the night. Clutching each other, they staggered off down the street. I peered at the ill-lit sign above the doorway. Paint peeled from the faded legendary which read, "The Battlefields Hotel".

Where was I? Was this 1988 or 1888? Unable, and now unwilling, to shake off this frontier feeling I strode confidently into the foyer. Some travelling types lay sprawled on an old lounge suite in front of a high fire. They stared at me briefly, then resumed their conversation in low tones. I passed a darkened, unoccupied television room and descended some steps to the "Ladies Bar". Two pretty teenagers and a lady of uncertain years cast glances my way. High energy disco music blared, incongruously from behind the bar. A fat-bellied man, ignored by the other three joined me at the bar. He bore a remarkable resemblance to Adolf Hitler. "Are you from up the drag or down the drag?" he enquired. ("You a stranger in these parts, mistuh?") After a fifteen minute fruitless conversation with this "ou", I was relieved when John Kyle and Glenda Beaumann arrived. Seeing an opportunity to escape from this broken-hearted cowboy, we politely retired to the fire in the foyer.

Here, the travellers conversation remained neutral and stultifying where are these ~~hike~~ Ramblers? (I blasphemed to myself.) Eventually the crowd materialised, the locals left, and the atmosphere improved as the two remaining hitch-hikers emerged from their shells. "Yo nov wy they call this place thuh "Battlefields Hotel?", I chided my anglicized friends. "Because the Boers are still fighting the !*!? British on Friday nights here!" Drinks came and went, the prospects of tenting in a freezing caravan park held little appeal for Marie. "Can't we go back to your place?", she pleaded. We returned to Estcourt. Spontaneity ruled the day or rather alcohol ruled the night. At home, a "Kitchener's tea-party" developed. Bruce pulled out the most sophisticated bottle of rot-gut I have tasted in many a year. Dick beamed as I spluttered my approval after a capful. Beer chasers followed until 1.00 a.m., when, like the others, we returned to the Land of Nod.

After a lazy breakfast, we motored north, to a spot just outside of Estcourt. The June weather was classically beautiful, our first site, a stone's throw from the N3 and half hidden in the tall sun-whitened grass. An old cement memorial, encrusted with sunken 303 cartridge cases, told it's own story of the derailed armoured train and the capture of a young war correspondent, called Churchill, by the Boers. We drove on to Clouston, a huge memorial site. Dick, John, and Brian Culross as "in-house" historical "boffins" kept us well informed. My

fears of my inability to conceptualise, because of ignorance, began to fade. I found myself explaining "things" to Marie, as I pieced together the battlefield strategies from my tutors. We tarried at Colenso Museum, fascinated by guns and artifacts. After parking the cars, we set off on a dusty hike around and through the thornveld countryside. Pom-pom Bridge, Mart's Hill, Buller, Roberts, the names began to roll off my tongue with familiar gase. Here and there, a ruined farmhouse, a Boer sangar (defence position), a cartridge case. I played a game of monument spotting with myself. These structures thrust themselves above the dense thornveld like numerous Cleopatra's Needles and often silhouetted against the skyline. After lunch at a "Victoria Falls" type waterfall we headed for Pieter's Station. The afternoon wore on, we sat against the ticket office wall soaking up the dying rays of the sun on the sleepy platform. The place looked as it had hardly changed in a hundred years. At any moment I expected horses and wagons to come hurtling into the station, bristling with armed Boers.

From ferried cars, we soon found ourselves ensconced in the Royal Hotel bar in Ladysmith. More beers, more disco. John winced visibly at the disco; we grinned, another conversation piece. Dick's friends promised to meet us at Spioenkop the next day. We arrived at the chalets after dark, settled in, but the braai firewood fizzled from wet sap. I contemplated the feasibility of a law-suit against a certain Continental cafe-owner in Ladysmith, not to speak of his doubtful parentage. We cooked indoors, beers again! Supper, and then a socio-political conversation developed. For once, my heart wasn't there, the ravages of hiking, history and alcohol had taken their toll. I must be getting old, I thought. (How dare you agree with me?)

On Sunday morning we strolled around the Spioenkop Museum as a preview to that notorious hill. A steep drive brought us to the huge summit which afforded an excellent 360° view of Natal and the Berg. By deduction, guesswork, and the brochure's we traced the tragic sequence of events. My imagination wandered to January weather conditions, lying in a pathetic, shallow trench and the incessant bombardment of Boer shell-fire. My thoughts returned to England and memories of childhood, of stern Victorian faces that stared out at me from the depths of sepia-brown photographs hung in a dusty hallway. How would I know, that thirty years hence, I might find myself transported to their final resting place in Southern Africa? The squawk of a white necked crow, perched on a nearby cross, woke me to reality. Knowing the bird's reputation in the Berg, I ignored it's morbid symbolism. Let's have lunch in the land of the living, for that's where I belonged. We paid a final visit to the field hospital for the survivors, this took the form of a recently occupied farmhouse on the Winterton road. John dropped me off at Estcourt, a week later I had to go down to Durban to recover my pack which I left in his car!

Thank you Dick for this very unusual trip. Under your leadership this weekend was a far cry from those stuffy Sunday outings one associates with tourist boards and schools. Hey! Let the good times roll!

Dave Easton

DEPARTURE POINTS FOR DAY HIKES

Durban: Change of departure venue for Sunday hikes - as from 7th August 1988 corner of Berea, Musgrave Road from "Musgrave Park" (old Osborne Hotel) parking area.
Pinetown: Union Main Centre - Old Main Road - outside Big Bite. Cars not to be parked outside Big Bite.

DIARY OF DURBAN RAMBLERS HIKING CLUB ACTIVITIES

AUGUST 1988

- 6/7 Berg Hike
Witsieshoek Mountain Resort from Royal National Park-
Leader Dick Billiet (813672 H).
Sun. 7 Ismont - Leader Joe Streyton - depart Durban 08h00 Pinetown
08h30 Members R7 Visitors R8.
13/14 Pillar Cave/Rhino Peak Drakensberg Gardens - Leader Steve
Watson (214512 H - 8 to 9 p.m.).
Sun. 14 Far Away Farm - Leader Eamon Bussy (473400 H).
Depart Pinetown 08h00 Durban 08h30 Members R4 Visitors R5.
Wed. 17 Photographic Meeting at 7.45 p.m. Phil Caws will be showing
slides on New York, Florida Keys and Disneyland - venue
Randall Scout Hall - Club fee R1 per person including
refreshments.
20/21 Ndedema Gorge - boulder hop to Poacher's Cave! Leader Terry
Lubbe (223857 H). Room for 6 hikers only - so book early!
Sun. 21 Cedar Circular - Leader Winnie Jackson (3052515 H). Depart
Durban 08h00 Pinetown 08h30. Members R6 Visitors R7.
Wed. 24 Braai/social gathering - An opportunity to get to know
fellow day and berg hikers. Starting approx. 6.15 p.m..
Bring your own meat and drinks. Venue Randall Scout Hall.
27/28 Tarn Cave - Bushmansnek - Leader Gavin Grix (428019 H).
Sun. 28 Vernon Crookes - Leader Phil Caws (441089 H). Depart
Pinetown 08h00 Durban 08h30. Members R5 Visitors R6.

SEPTEMBER 1988

- Sat. 3 BARN DANCE!! BARN DANCE!!
A fun evening for you and your friends - R6 per person-
braai 6.30 p.m. Bring your own food.
Barn Dance 7.30 p.m. Bring your own drinks.
- Cold drinks available - Venue Randall Scout Hall.
Sun. 4 Stainbank Hike 'n' braai - Leader Bettie Smetryns (445902 H)
Depart Pinetown 09h30 Durban 10h00 Members R3 Visitors R2
Club will provide fires - bring your own meat etc.
10/11 Sterkhorn - Leader Rosemary Foster (3057622 B) (or Terry
Lubbe (223857 H) between 15-28 August).
10th to 19th Namaqualand Daisy Venture plus 3 day traverse of
Cedarberg. Phone Dick Billiet (813672 H).
Sun. 11 Hornets Krantz - Leader Mike Morillion (3091566 H). Depart
Durban 08h00 Pinetown 08h30. Members R5 Visitors R6
Sun. 18 Empisini Hike and lunchtime braai - Leader Tom de Waal
(474766 H). Depart Pinetown 08h00 Durban 08h30 Members R5
Visitors R6. Club will provide fires.
Wed. 21 Photographic meeting - at 7.45 p.m. Ray Ludick (of
"Photoworld") will entertain members with audio-visuals of
Indigenous places and peoples of Natal - venue Randall Scout
Hall Club fee R1 per person including refreshments.
24/25 Inkosana Lodge - Cathkin area - Day walks - R25 per person-
organised by Dave Easton - Phone Rosemary Foster (3057622
B) (or Terry Lubbe (223857 H) between 15-28 August). Book
early as limit is 14 people.
Sun. 25 Umgeni Valley Ranch - Leader Phil Caws (441089 H). Depart
Durban 08h00 Pinetown 08h30 Members R6 Visitors R7 plus
entrance fee of R2.
Wed. 28 Braai/social gathering - bring you own meat and drinks-
starts approx. 6.15 p.m. at Randall Scout Hall.

VENUE PHOTOGRAPHIC MEETINGS/SOCIAL GATHERING

Randall Scout Hall, Milner Road (behind Cowey Centre, next to
electricity sub station). Please park in Milner Road.

OCTOBER 1988

- 1/2 Old Voortrekker Tail Hike (Oliviershoek Pass area). leader
Dick Billiet (813672 H).
Sun. 2 Ngomankhulu - Leader Eamon Bussy (473400 H). Depart Durban
08h00 Pinetown 08h30. Members R5 Visitors R6.
8/9/10 Vergelegen Map and compass exploration - Leader Bill Hyslop
(726763 H).
Sun. 9 Moss trail - Leader Jo Streyton (215985 H). Depart Durban
08h00 Pinetown 08h30. Members R4 Visitors R5.
Sun. 16 Table Mountain - Leader Steve Watson (214512 H). Depart
Durban 08h00 Pinetown 08h30. Members R6 Visitors R7.
Wed. 19 Photographic meeting at 7.45 p.m. Venue Randall Scout Hall-
club fee R1 per person including refreshments - phone
Trevor Coxon (425531 H) for details.
22/23 Vernon Crookes Clean-up - Leader Tom de Waal (474766 H).
Depart Durban 2 p.m. Saturday 22nd. Bring: tents, own food,
meat and drinks for Saturday night braai - work party
Sunday. - YOUR SUPPORT FOR THIS PROJECT IS REQUIRED!
Wed. 26 Braai/social gathering - bring your own meat and drinks.
Starts 6-6.30 p.m. at Randall Scout Hall.
Sun. 30 Annual get-together at "Old Cranford Farm" - Leader Margret
Kirsten (441467 H). Full details in next magazine.

NOVEMBER 1988

- Sun 6. Sora's Pool - Leader Jo Streyton (215985 H). Depart Durban
08h00 Pinetown 08h30. Members R4 Visitors R5.

DECEMBER 1988

- 26 to 31 Brandwater Trail - Eastern Free State - cost - transport and
trail fees approx. R80. Food extra. Contact Winnie Jackson
(3052515) or (812328) for more particulars. Advisable to
book early as numbers are limited.

Approx. dates Wild Coast Hike - Phone Steve Watson
26 to 31 (214512 H) for details.

THE FRIENDLY THINGS

OH, IT'S JUST THE LITTLE HOMEY THINGS,
THE UNOBTUSIVE, FRIENDLY THINGS,
THE "WON'T-YOU-LET-ME-HELP-YOU" THINGS,
THAT MAKE THE PATHWAY LIGHT.

"THE LAUGH-WITH-ME-IT'S-FUNNY" THINGS
AND IT'S THE JOLLY, JOKING THINGS,
THE "NEVER-MIND-THE-TROUBLE" THINGS
THAT MAKE THE WORLD SEEM BRIGHT.

FOR ALL THE COUNTLESS FAMOUS THINGS,
THE WONDROUS RECORD-BREAKING THINGS,
THESE "NEVER-CAN-BE-EQUALLED" THINGS,
THAT ALL THE PAPERS CITE.

ARE NOT THE LITTLE HUMAN THINGS,
THE "EVERY-DAY-ENCOUNTERED" THINGS,
THE "JUST-BECAUSE-I-LIKE-YOU" THINGS,
THAT MAKE US HAPPY QUITE.

SO HERE'S TO ALL THE LITTLE THINGS,
THE "DONE-AND-THEN-FORGOTTEN" THINGS,
THOSE "OH-IT'S-SIMPLY-NOTHING" THINGS,
THAT MAKE LIFE WORTH THE FIGHT.

Act. To Super Standard.

RELIEF RELIVED

(Colenso/Spionkop exploration weekend, 17th - 19th June 1988)

Colenso, Spionkop, Vaal Krantz, Tugela Heights: if you remember your school lessons, or you've taken an interest in history since then, you'll recognise that sequence of four engagements by which General Sir Redvers Buller attempted to break through the line of Boer trenches and sangars along the Tugela, and so relieve Ladysmith. Well, you may recognise them, but have you ever walked over the ground? By doing so you begin to get just a faint inkling of what those comfortably long-ago struggles demanded from the flesh and blood that charged and defended, endured and retreated. Armed with curiosity and explanatory notes, and on the verge of hypothermia, ten Ramblers under the command of Dick Billiet (thanks, Dick, from us all for setting up the arrangements) assembled in front of a begrudging fire at the Battlefields Hotel, Colenso, on the evening of Friday June 17th, with the aim of acquiring just a little of that understanding. Almost at once the first crisis of morale occurred. An already half-hearted enthusiasm for persuading tent pegs into the freezing ground of the town's camp site was further undermined by a splinter group who declared for sleeping at the hotel. The gathering mood of indecision and schism was swept away by Dave Easton, who generously invited us all to backtrack 30 km to his floor at Estcourt. Dear Dave.

Saturday morning. And now the story - or do I mean itinerary?- really begins.

At 08.30 on 15th November 1899, Hairy Mary ran into a heap of stones that shouldn't have been there, and so delivered Winston Churchill into a Boer prison camp. Today, the site of the "Armoured Train Incident", at the junction of the old main road and the N3, just north of Frere, is marked (for those who take the trouble to pause and park) by a monument, a grave, the contours of the old railway track, and an explanatory "diorama".

Our next stop was the Clouston Military Cemetery, by the side of the N3, and 2 km before Colenso itself. To this hilltop site have been brought many of the graves and monuments which at one time were scattered all round the area at points where "it actually happened". In November 1899, Buller surveyed his Colenso battlefield from this place; on this morning in 1988 - so - briefly - did we.

At the police station in Colenso - just next to the original 1879 "Bulwer" bridge - you may ask for a key that unlocks a museum housed next door in the old toll-gate cottage. Here are maps, photographs and relics of the Ladysmith campaign, all in an evocative (and slightly musty) period atmosphere.

Leaving our cars now, we shouldered packs, formed up, and marched off in the wake of 23000 ghosts. Crossing the Tugela by a railway bridge that stands beside the still visible stumps of the one the Boers blew up, and diverting briefly to rediscover the faint traces of Fort Wylie, we followed the line of the old railway (which here runs next to the new) as it passes below the confusion of small hills that are called Colenso Koppies. Buller's troops never even got close to crossing the Tugela in November 1899, but the following February it was raking fire from these hills that imposed the first serious check on their progress in the Battle of the Tugela Heights. Unable to dislodge the Boers from the crests by frontal attacks, the British continued to extend to their right in a series of outflanking attempts. Each attempt was frustrated by a whole sequence of defended hills - Horseshoe, Wynnes, Hart's - and each attempt exposed an ever longer supply line to enfilading fire, making reinforcement an impossibly bloody business.

We traced out all these moves, and read the price tags that still stand at intervals all along this narrow plain between river and hills: the monuments erected "by their brother officers", by grieving parents and by bereaved wives to the dead of the Somerset Light Infantry, of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, of the Inniskillings, of the South Lancers, of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, the list goes on and on, to end with graves that record the resting place of "a brave soldier" whose remains were so pulped by shell-fire or decomposed by delay that none could tell name, rank or regiment. Such are the real, and bitter, fruits of warmongering, today as much as then.

A distance of time, however, and a lack of personal involvement insulates one from old sorrows; consequently we for the most part reconstructed tactics rather than relived individual tragedies. So it was we were able to lunch cheerfully enough where the Tugela Falls pour over a wide, 20 m high dolerite sill (impressive enough to be worth a visit, even if history bores you). Rested, we then set off to pass through the area (Pieters and Railway Hills) where a final right hook from Buller at last dashed the Boer line to pieces and so opened the road to Ladysmith.

The day's walking ended at Pieters Station whence, after a quick two-step between our strategically located cars, we too entered Ladysmith, making a beeline for beer at the Royal Hotel. Then it was on to Spionkop Resort, and to another night out of the frost in a Parks Board cottage - and in real beds moreover!

Emerging leisurely from Sunday breakfast we studied our way around the resort's instructive museum, where the whole campaign in all its many moves is succinctly and simply explained by means of diagrams, diorams and photographs. Reprimed with understanding we drove then to the top of Spionkop itself, which has recently been taken under the Parks Board's wing. Their (fairly) clear brochure leads you along a self-guided trail that passes all the principal reminders of this fearful battle, where Louis Botha's burghers and the British fought each other into mutual exhaustion. Both sides abandoned the hilltop slaughter-house during the night, but Botha was quicker on the uptake than the British the following morning and rushed his men back onto the summit, thus snatching the victory and securing his defences for a few more weeks.

Whilst we sat on the Kop, lurching, chattering, and admiring the view of the dam below, and of the woody hill that hides the bush camp from sight, we were perhaps not mindful enough of the horrors that had been endured there 88 years ago, and that had brought us there in the first place. Perceiving this, chance arranged that the cry of "What's that?" revealed a raven sitting silently on one for the tombstones, black as death, with a beak as heavy and menacing as an executioner's axe; and that shortly afterwards three vultures arrived to circle overhead.

Brian Culross

Durban
Rambblers
Walking Club
BARN DANCE



Saturday
3/9/88
8
BR
6:30 pm
Dance
7:30 pm

...at... Randal
Scout Hall
... Millner Rd
... behind
Cowey Centre

Bring your
own
food & drink
* Cold drinks
available

R6⁰⁰
per
person

