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The response to my appeal for members to send in any articles which may be of interest to other members of the Club, has been really first-class. This month Rocky Vivier and Claude Howell have furnished me with some very interesting material, for which I am very grateful. Thanks a lot, boys.

HIKE TO LEOPARDS' LAGOON : Sunday, 10th January.

Apparently the celebrations over the festive season proved too much for a large number of regular Ramblers, as the attendance dropped to a mere 28 on this, the first hike of the year. (Maybe the absentees just didn't think much of my good friend Dymock's ability as a Leader ... who knows?)

However, having travelled up by train from town we met Dymock and little Allan at Marianhill Station, which was to be our jumping off point. After dishing out a bag of grenadillas and pineapples and a couple of boxes of soft drinks to the "hoi pollois", he led us off down the winding road past umteen Indian stores and lemonade joints. The weather was delightfully cool and the very light, intermittent drizzle kept it so.

Soon we had reached the stream at the bottom of the valley. This is usually only a trickle of water that one can step across in a few bounds. This time, however, swollen by the recent rains it presented quite an obstacle. A few

took/....

off their boots and waded through, while others, led by little Allan, undertook the breathtaking journey through the air on the "soap box aerial cable car. When Scotty's turn came we nearly left him in the middle of the river to meditate on the folly of his ways, and thus improve his soul. However, his earnest pleadings were just too heart-rending to ignore, so we brought him the rest of the way across. From the cableway it was but a short step up the river to the waterfall where the lunch spot is situated.

After consuming our respective lunches - of which fruit salad seemed to form a major portion - the need for exercise made itself felt. "Snakebite" and Mick Thomas then proceeded to scale the face of the krantz on the opposite side of the river (and got well and truly stung by nettles for their bravado). Then Pete Shanahan was dumped in the river, clothes and all, much to the amusement of all who saw. Seeking further outlet for their excess energy, the boys indulged in a bit of long-jump on the sandy patch next to the river. Mick who proved to be the ablest jumper, finished up landing in the water on several occasions. (Can this be a late competitor in the Frog Olympics?) The Treasurer, Rae, still full of nonsense after his tour of the Cape, interfered with a few jumpers during their run-up and was seized and thrown in the river.

Once again an unfortunate newcomer was "hypnotized" by Scotty, much to her chagrin. Three-fifteen, and after rubbish had been disposed of, we set out on the return journey. After ferrying everyone across the stream again, we hiked back to the Station, there to find that the train was running an hour late. We settled down to rest in the waiting room and wiled away the time in singing. A scramble for seats on the train led one party of 15 to squeeze into one compartment, but we didn't seem to mind as we sang all the way back to Durban.

ACROSS THE MALUTIS AND DOWN THE BERG : By Rocky Vivier.

Saturday, Dec. 12th: Arrived Fouriesburg, our starting point, 2.15 p.m. Footed it from Station along a steep, climbing road to the town 6 miles away. After very welcome refreshments at the local restaurant we hired a taxi to Buthebuthe, 3 miles across the Basutoland border. A Native policeman checked our papers and asked the usual rather pertinent questions before giving us the right of way. On arrival we were summoned into the presence of the local M. J.istrate and honoured with supper and lodging for the night.

Sunday, 13th December: Left Buthebuthe 8 a.m. under 70-lb. packs. Proceeded in a north-easterly direction among the foothills of the Malutis. Our first impressions? Breath-taking scenery ... country rough and going very hard. Stopped for lunch at an outpost called Rossiga, 7 miles away. Pressed on to Khukhuni that night - distance approx. 18 miles. Weather excellent.

Monday, 14th Dec : Broke camp 7.30 walked straight for Chadibe (9,400 ft.) one of the most impressive peaks I have encountered in South Africa. We are working our way into a magnificent basin with the Mateng Pass as our ultimate aim. To-night we camp at a dipping post in the shadow of the Malutis. (Today's funny story When a nutty Basuto asked for medicine to make him popular with Europeans and Natives alike, I recommended Granpa's Headache Powders....) The owner of this property is too scared to sleep here at night but gave us permission to do so. This fear is nothing new to us. We were briefed on it by the Authorities at Buthebuthe. Several Basutos en route expressed the same anxiety - the reason being "ritual murder". Some refer to it in guarded tones while others discuss their fears openly. According to the White Authorities, the reason is of a political nature. The Chiefs lost most of their legal power and merely officiate in an administrative and minor arbitrary capacity today. This they resent, and, in an attempt to maintain their prestige and power they adopt a process of systematic persecution. The victim is usually nominated through the influence of the Chief. Torturing follows a definite routine. First the nose, ears and lips are severed, and then other portions of the body. Eventually death/....

death is administered in a very slow and evil manner.

Tuesday, 15th Dec : Today we crossed the Malutis. A four mile zig-zag path sapped our strength to the marrow. Eventually Jonny gave his pack to a Basuto who took it up on horseback. Justin proved very tenacious and carried his own. Reached top at 12.30. Then it suddenly started to rain. We erected a very primitive shelter at a nearly sangar, using our capes for a roof. After half-an-hour we decided to "press on regardless". Then hail started to hammer us in a merciless fashion. Progress under these conditions was very slow as we slipped and fell with monotonous regularity in the hail. We reached the Madimamadso River at 5 p.m. and found it still negotiable. I regard crossing this river as disposing of one of the major obstacles in our journey. It is not only dangerous, but according to local information, has claimed many lives. It can retard your progress for from 5 to 7 days when in flood. Camped on the opposite bank. Germolene came in for considerable use to-night. Justin swears blind his shoulder-blade is broken. Distance covered - about 25 miles. Johnny is suffering from blisters. My worst experience of the day was when I slipped in a heap of cow dung! I expressed a very decisive opinion about the entire matter which apparently amused my companions, as a hilarious roar greeted my remarks.

Wednesday, 16th Dec: Today we made a terrible blunder. A Native pointed out a footpath to Mt. aux Sources leading in a northerly direction. This was contrary to our reckoning but we decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. At midday we found this path still following the banks of the Madimamadso River towards Lahono on the northern border. At three o'clock we called a halt and then decided to cut back across the mountains to our originally proposed route. Going extremely hard. At 4 p.m. rain and hail drove us into a discarded hut on top of the mountain. What a place! still, we thanked God for it. Yesterday Justin took the name and address of every Basuto he met and promised faithfully to write to him if he survived. Today he made a solemn vow never to speak to another "blanket king" again. The country is very mountainous and deceiving in this area, as Justin and Johnny discovered to their dismay, having wagered

considerable money between them as to the whereabouts of certain landmarks.

Thursday, 17th Dec : Set out early. Cut straight across a high ridge running due West - reached our proposed route at 10 a.m., high up in the cattle country. Proceeded through very tough and rugged terrain for about 12 miles under threatening clouds. Then the rain came, followed by the inevitable hail. Reached Thakabana cattle post at 5 p.m., three cold, bedraggled figures. Johnny fell in the only r. where we crossed today, but nothing will ever really get this little fellow down. Pitched tent inside a sangar erected under a krantz. I have seldom, if ever, been so cold as I am to-night. Sleeping in muddy water won't improve matters much either. However, spirits are high and through chattering teeth quite a few spicy jokes were exchanged. I have caught a bad cold and feel rather feverish.

Friday, 18th Dec : Departed 6 a.m. after a miserable night and climbed straight up onto a plateau. Going very awkward, ground muddy. 10 a.m. found us overlooking a deep gorge stretching for miles. Indeed picturesque, but very precipitous. Decided to walk around. Soon afterwards we encountered a path leading from Makhotlong to Namahadi in the north. About midday a Basuto trek joined us and with them they brought the storm that had threatened all morning. Inside 15 minutes the country was enveloped in a mist so thick that I could practically hear Johnny breathing next to me but could not see him. Called a halt. After an hour the mist lifted slightly and we pushed on. Now a slow rain and a biting wind. The Basutos pointed out a hut used by Police as an outpost. This structure formed our abode for the night. Unquestionably the worst ventilated den this side of Hell. In the middle of the night I nearly suffocated. Frantic desperation for air drove me outside where I sat for the rest of the night. Rather an eerie experience sitting out there in the gale and rain, with Kaffir dogs howling to the accompaniment of jackals through the small hours of the morning.

Saturday, 19th Dec : This morning the one side of my face is badly swollen. Left the hut at 6 a.m. and found ourselves about 2 hrs. away from Mt. aux Sources. I will never forget the expressions on the faces of my two companions when we climbed/...

the ridge above the hut and saw this elusive peak looming up in front of us. My own feelings I would rather not record, except that I was probably feeling too ill to care. During the afternoon John and I decided to have a look around. Visited Sentinel Hut and found it locked. Admired Devil's Tooth Sentinel and ventured a peep at Natal. The latter, however, evaded us. Mist again. Towards evening mist and rain set in heavily, and so after our first square meal for three days, we kept a very early and welcome appointment with our sleeping bags.

Sunday, 20th Dec : Awoke to an impenetrable mist and soft rain - very cold. Decided to call a rest day. I spent the whole day in bed with a high fever and bad cough. Vision out of my left eye has been reduced to nil.

Monday, 21st Dec : Departed 5.30 a.m. Glorious day. I have found the sudden changes of weather almost equal to the unpredictability of a woman's mind. We followed the path from Mt. aux Sources to Makhotlong until it crossed the Senku River. Then we branched left onto an indistinct cattle track along the eastern slopes of the valley. Early in the afternoon we came across a path leading towards the edge of the Drakensberg. Pitched camp at 5.30 p.m. in a beautiful valley. Our fuel is running short so we attempted to light a fire but a shower washed it out. Food is getting as scarce as serviceable muscles by now. Yours truly is making a pig of himself. Discovered that cocoa dissolved in cold water with sugar is very palatable.

Tuesday, 22nd Dec. Hiked from 5.30 a.m. Reached the edge of the Berg near the Rockeries at 8 a.m. Took some snaps. The panorama that unfolded before our eyes this morning with the low, loose hanging clouds way beyond us is etched on my mind with that evergrowing collection of the little patches of heaven gazed upon over the years gone by. After breakfast we pressed on at a stiff pace. The last two days we have really "bashed" it while the weather holds, also our bodies can scarcely be expected to take kindly to a further tightening of the belt. Stopped for lunch on the southern bank of the Sinko (Orange) River. Here we bought a bottle of milk from a Basuto herd boy, closed our eyes, crossed our fingers, spat out the typhoid germs, and enjoyed the rest. Staggered on immediately at a brisk pace. Camped for the

night on a steep slope behind the Horns in the Cathedral area. Photographed the Bell and Cathedral before sundown. Spirits very high. Probably the anticipation of the nearing of the end of our journey, or perhaps it's just the exhilaration we all experience at the sight of old friends.

Wednesday, 23rd Dec : Mist very thick. Walked along the top of the Berg to Cockade. Conditions absolutely impossible now. Nothing to do but bide the time of Nature. Made another attempt during the afternoon. Progressed about 3 to 4 miles then we decided to look for the hut recently erected by the Transvaal section of the Mountain Club. Could not find it - instead nearly lost ourselves. Nothing to do now but camp for the night. Another day wasted.

Thursday, 24th Dec : Awoke to similar conditions. Justin is looking around for lizards, horses, Basutos ... anything to eat. Frankly I am scared stiff. Justin walked right behind me most of the way, and if he takes up that position again, it will only be a matter of time before he bites a piece out of my neck. Of course, that is if I don't get in first! Johnny just grins knowingly. A dark character this. About 9 a.m. we plodded on slowly. Eventually found the Mountain Club hut and decided to descend the Berg at Indedema. Going rather precarious with weird peaks towering above us in the heavy mist like prehistoric monsters. Then we lost the path and attempted a route down a gully. This soon proved a mistake as we got into difficulties. On reaching what appeared to be the edge of a fall with water cascading into space, we realised that there was no alternative but to go back. Here I wish to thank the Ramblers Club for saving my pack for me, because if it were not for their snakebite outfit inside it, I would certainly have hurled it down the mountain. After, although awkward, perhaps the most interesting half hour of our trip, we again reached the gully and found the path among the high grass where we lost it. This path led in a northerly direction close to the top of the Berg for a long way. When we got out of the mist we found ourselves near the Contour Path not far from the Cathedral Hostel, where we decided to call in as we had about 1 oz. sugar left between the three of us. We failed to replenish our supplies but were offered food and lodging for the night. The term "Hostel Gaper" will always remind me in years to come of Xmas Eve, 1953 at Cathedral Peak Hostel. The next

morning we discussed the position and decided to terminate our journey in view of the circumstances.

So ends one of the hardest, but greatest experiences of my Rambling career. The elements were very hard against us, but it afforded me ample opportunity to admire and appreciate the most picturesque part of our land. To those who went with me I wish to say that I could never have shared the company of better men. My advice to those who plan a similar trip - DON'T. If you still persist, well you are in for one of the greatest experiences that will ever come your way in this game and please take me with you.

(Incidentally Rocky does not mention that they hiked over 200 miles in this trip. One thing puzzles me. Why has he hidden his literary light under a bushel for so long? We hope to see more of his writing in the Newsletter in future.) ED.

SOCIAL NEWS :

Our heartiest congratulations and good wishes for their future happiness go out to Bokkie Daniels and Mona van Zyl who are getting married down in the Cape on the 23rd. They are both leaving Durban for good. To you both... good-bye, it's been very nice knowing you.

Pat Carter, who recently returned to England, is also being married on the 23rd. The wedding is to be in Cleckheaton in Yorkshire. She is marrying a fellow named David Oliver and will be coming out to settle in Livingstone. Here's wishing you both long life and every happiness in your future. I hope David realises what a gem of a wife he is getting.

We also tender our heartiest congratulations to Cliff Johnson and Pauline Jones who have announced their engagement.

Eunice Viljoen, that very hardy hiker, has also left Durban to take up a post in Bloemfontein.

The Executive Committee has received a very nice letter from Maria and Bernie Bent, thanking us all for the mantle-piece clock they were given as a wedding present.

Christmas greetings have been received from Margaret Moore who is over in the United Kingdom at the moment.

Wae Adams has just returned from a very interesting tour of the Cape with Des Watkins and his party. I understand they did a few short trips in the mountains down there, and camped on top of Table Mountain for a few days.

Rae's sister, Mary Adams, has been in Wentworth Hospital for some weeks now undergoing a series of operations. Hope you get really well soon, Mary.

Lindie has also been down to the Cape on holiday, and returned with a sizeable paunch. He says he will sweat that out on the next few hikes. So ... Ramblers beware.

I understand Pierre Wehner is making a Western film. Poor old Claude Howell is acting as the stooge who gets bumped off a moving train and generally messed around before he is shot. Gordon Payne is to be the sweating engine driver.

Peter Hounsell had the misfortune to be knocked over by a car while walking home a few nights ago. He is progressing favourably, however, recovering from concussion and a nasty cut on the head.

Terry Norcott has been transferred to Ladysmith, and Archie Cockburn will be leaving us soon.

Teresa Ogle is teaching at the Umdlali Government School and is staying at the Salt Rock Hotel.

Mr. Anonymous, let's have some more details. ED.

THE PIETERMARITZBURG TO DURBAN CANOE RACE by Claude Howell.

(Who says our modern youth is getting soft?
This is Claude's version of a couple of days' hardship, and very well written too. ED)

Before I even start this short summary of the P.M.B. to Durban Canoe race, my friends, let me apologize for letting the Ramblers down by not even completing the full course.

I'll try not to let my mind wander into pastures of how the race could have been, but how it was. First of all, let me introduce you to my team mate Patrick Denis Olsen, who is exactly my height and has the heart of a lion and the feet of a Rambler.

It was a real South Beach day, that Wednesday January 6th, when we lined our canoes up on the river bank in Alexandra Park. All the big boys were prancing around, feeling the weights and looking at the canoes with expert, critical eyes. When they came round to P.D.'s and mine and found that they weighed 43-lbs. each, they shook their heads with deep sympathy and asked us if we intended taking a trip round the world in them afterwards. All I could do was put on a sickly grin and wish I were on the Moon. It appeared that our single canoes were heavier than some of the double ones. After that we tried to be as inconspicuous as possible until the Mayor of Maritzburg arrived to give us a royal send-off. And what a send-off it was too! He had to roll his pants well above his knees in order to shake hands with us as we were standing in about 9 inches of mud.

After a few preliminary speeches by a guy whom I'd never seen before, but who said he knew us all pretty well, and facing a barrage of cameras for good measure, the Mayor fired his gun and we were off to a flying start.

P.D. kept on telling me to take it easy - don't rush as we still had a long way to go - and I kept

saying "Yes" as I lowered my boat into the water and straightened up to step into it with dignity. It was then that some Jc'burg dope came careering full-bore down the bank and caught me square in the back, making me step right over my boat into the drink, with him following suit. When we eventually got sorted out we were really on our way.

We canoed along in fine style until we reached the Weir where there was one colossal mix-up. One of the chappie's cagoes had overturned, throwing the occupant into the water where another overturned canoe caught him behind the legs and started slowly dragging him under the Weir which was about six inches under water at the time. We all made a grab and tried to pull him out, but he just kept on going under. Eventually a crowd of spectators lent a hand and we managed to pull him out.

Under way once more with the river running fast and Maritzburg 5 miles away, I was just beginning to settle down when P.D. informed me that we would start walking from that point because it would cut off five miles of river. It was there that we discovered our greatest snag. Getting the canoes to the side of the river was no problem but we could barely manage to lift them out of the water. As I have said before, the canoes weighed 43-lbs. each at the starting post, but now that they had been in the river for a while they had become water-logged and each must have weighed 63-lbs. Our packs were about 30-lbs. apiece bringing the total weight carried to somewhere in the region of 95-lbs. each by our oars. Undaunted we pushed the packs and canoes onto each other's backs and headed for the hills. I am afraid those hills were miniature mountains, and the canoes kept slipping off our packs, while the shoulder straps made mincemeat of our shoulders.

By the time we got to Campbell's farm we were, as the newspaper so crudely put it : "A long while after", but we were sixth out of a field of 34 at that point. Most of the others had given in before that point when they found that it required a lot of walking if they wanted to keep up with the field.

At Campbell's farm we set the canoes back into the water with that air of finality as though to say - you

were made for the water, and that's where you are going to stay. From that point we seemed to hit the biggest rapids we'd seen. But our canoes were especially built for rough, turbulent waters such as these, and they virtually sprang to life. They bucked and pitched like living things, jumping anything from a ripple to a waterfall, and it took us all our time keeping the bows straight with the current. Every now and then, it seemed that the canoes got the stone needle and just threw us overboard. At times like these we were washed quite a way downstream until we could get out of the main current and grab hold of bushes at the river side. In such cases we'd have to walk about a quarter of a mile downstream to retrieve our canoes.

In stretches of smooth water we were able to look around at what scenery the land had to offer and in this we were certainly not disappointed. Everything looked so calm and peaceful. Wild duck were plentiful and didn't even seem interested in the two madmen who were rowing down the river while the sun set in a ball of flame to the right. I'm afraid you have got to be on a river yourself to really appreciate a sunset out in the wilds. Even the river seems to slacken its pace with hardly a ripple on the surface, and a quiet hush descends which you dare not break.

We made camp about five miles from Nagle Dam bridge. I may be miles out, but I reckon that we had travelled about 40 miles that first day. Making camp was not an elaborate affair - just putting on dry clothes which we had with us, gorging two tins of bully beef and a tin of peaches, and gulping down some tea. We then placed the one canoe on its side and the other across so as to form a small shelter for our heads, rolled out our ground sheets, and slept like logs we were so tired.

When we awoke next morning we found that it had rained during the night, so that neck downwards we were wet through, that part of our bodies being exposed to the elements. We managed to get a fire going and over a cup of tea held a big indaba as to our next move. Our handi-cap was that the canoes were too heavy, but if we left one behind and shared the other, we could get in on this

portage racket and, by short cuts, make Mfula Trading Store that night.

With our plans made we left the one canoe at a Native kraal and proceeded to walk from 8.30 that morning till 11.20 that night up a tortuous trail that seemed unending. We'd walk for half an hour, rest for five minutes; walk for half an hour, rest for five minutes, until we became dizzy and lost all track of time. The most heartbreaking sight was when we reached the top of the mountain, looked down the other side and saw a little light from the store, but never seemed to reach it. The more we walked the further it seemed to flit away. When we eventually did reach the store we were in a pretty exhausted state, but it's surprising what a couple of hours' sleep can do.

Next morning we were up early, but the river had risen during the night making it dangerous for two of us to try the water in a single canoe. In fact, the official there more or less forbade us to carry on.

So there, my friends, you have it. A Jo'burg entrant wrote a lot of trash about everybody not being treated the same, but don't believe it. I went up as a complete stranger, but was certainly not treated as such. If the race itself didn't go as I presumed a river race would, then all I am going to do is to write it up in that little book of experience and give that Ole'River another go next year. If they want to hold that 36 hrs. as a record, then I don't see how they can change any of the portage rulings, unless by its annulment as a record.

It's a great race, boys. All you need is a good canoe and a staunch companion such as I had in Patrick Denis Olsen.

BRAAIVLEIS & DANCE AT ATHLONE : Friday, 15th January.

A fair number of Ramblers gathered at Madison's on this evening to go out to Athlone to attend our usual January social. We danced to the music of Basil Metaxas on the open-air floor until the eats were brought. Soon Rambler and

Ramblerette were busy "braaing" luscious chops, steak and boerewors over the glowing braziers. Gosh, that meat was nice! I saw one fair maiden tucking into what looked like at least 4 people's share, and she wasn't even looking ashamed. One hardy Rambler was seen seated at the table eating his supper complete with knife and fork. Then a soft drizzle chased the other members of the public into the barn, and the Band had to follow. Having eaten our fill, we gradually drifted up to join in the dancing until closing time.

KATH'S CORNER.

I WONDER

Which two Ramblerettes were unanimously declared the winners of the "Nattering Contest":

Which Ramblerette found five different brands of lipstick on her partner's face after the Christmas Eve Dance at Kent House.

Who gave the following directions for getting home after the New Year's Eve party :- "Twist my right ear three times, pull my left ear twice, turn left at the first robot and say : "This is Mrs. little boy"!!

What happened to all those enthusiasts who promised to attend a picnic on New Year's day. We hear that even the organiser forgot to turn up. Shame on you, Pete!

Why the Rambler lasses failed to turn up to the Athlone Braai-veils in full force. Believe some of the lads were even queuing for dances!

NEW MEMBERS :

We wish to welcome the following new members to the Club :

Miss V.M. Culverwell,

Mr. J.W. Hurst.

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