

DUNBAR = CAMPERS

REYNOLDS = CLIMB

Oct/Nov '89





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Affiliated to the Hiking Federation of South Africa

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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1989

MAG 5/89

A special thankyou again to those who have contributed to this magazine. I have had many calls from members who have said how much they have enjoyed these articles - so please continue. Thank you also to those who have responded to our appeal for outstanding subs.

Top of the list as usual a very warm welcome to the following new members:

Graham Hammond; Neil Podmore; Elizabeth Milne; K.N.Elias;
Anthony Tillim; Denise Mc Kay; Maria Gibbons; Marie Swart;
Judy Zingel and Janina Urbanowicz.

Congratulations and very best wishes from us all to the following:

Stephanie Rogerson and David Tuer on their forthcoming marriage
Marie McCauley and Graham Ferreira on their engagement.

We all join in wishing Glenda Bauman a speedy recovery.

We are very sad to learn of the passing of Roger Passant. Our thoughts are with his family.

LAST REMINDER: Don't forget the Barn Dance at Hlabeni on 30 September.
For details telephone Bruce Medway : (H) 235895

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DEPARTURE POINTS FOR DAY HIKES:

Durban: Musgrave Park parking area - corner Berea/Musgrave Roads.
Pinetown: Union Main Centre - Old Main Road - Outside Tiffanys (formerly Big B!

VENUE FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC MEETINGS:

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

DIARY OF EVENTS:

OCTOBER 1989

- Sun 1 Barn Dance Weekend.
- Sun 8 UMKUMAAS FALLS: Leader Steve Watson. Tel (H) 214512. Magnificent Umfumaas Gorge. Depart Pinetown 7h30; Durban 08h00. Members R8. Visitors R9.
- 7 - 10 Camping at Ian Garland Resources Centre at Mtunzini. Tents required. Contact Winnie Jackson. Tel (H) 3052515.
- 7 - 10 UPPER INJASUTI Cave: Passports and tents required. Leader Phillip Gatenby. Tel (H) 213592.
- Sun 15 UMPAMPANYONI: Leader Tom de Waal. Tel (H) 474766. Along the beautiful Umpampanyoni river. Dep. Pinetown 07h30. Durban 08h00. Members R8. Visitors R9.
- 14 / 15 Explore Eagle Gorge in the Monk's Cowl Area. Tents required. Leader Terry Lubbe. Tel (H) 223857.
- Wed 18 PHOTOGRAPHIC MEETING at 7.45 p.m.
R1.00 per person includes refreshments. Graham Tilbury will entertain us with slides of Marion Island taken during a years duty at the Republic's Weather Station.
- Sun 22 TOPS NEEDLE: Leader Steve Watson. Tel (H) 214512. Hike to the new Inanda Dam. Dep. Durban 08h00. Pinetown 08h30. Members R6. Visitors R7.
- 21 / 22 ANNUAL REUNION AT MC CONNELL'S FARM: Those who wish to camp Saturday night will be very welcome. B.Y.O. Braai facilities provided. Tents will be required. Contact Scotty Vallance : Tel (H) 296409
or Winnie Jackson : Tel (H) 3052515
- Sun 29 BLEAKHOUSE: Leader Winnie Jackson. Tel. (H) 3052515. Interesting new route. Dep. Durban 07h30. Pinetown 08h00. Members R8. Visitors R9.
- 28 / 29 BIGGARSBERG-HIKE organised by the Dundee Biggarsberg Chapter of the Wildlife Society. Leader Dennis Holmes. For Durban bookings and details contact Dick Billiet. Tel (H) 813672.

NOVEMBER 1989

- Sun 5 ISMOUTH HIGH: Leader Scotty Vallance. Tel (H) 296409.
Dep. Durban 08h00. Pinetown 08h30. Members R8. Visitors R9.
- 4 / 5 CHAMELEON Cave from Cobham returning via Umzimkhulwana Hut. Tents
for Friday night. Leader Dick Billiet. Tel (H) 813672.
- Sun 12 NAGEL DAM: New hike on opposite side of dam. Leader Bill Hyslop.
Tel (H) 214512. Dep. Durban 07h30. Pinetown 08h00.
Members R7. Visitors R8.
- 11 / 12 WILSONS CAVE: Tents required for Friday. Ideal for beginners.
Leader Jack Aumord. Tel (H) 423245.
- Wed 15 PHOTOGRAPHIC MEETING AT 7.45 p.m.
R1 per person includes refreshments. Mike Kosch presents "Life
at the S.A.N.A.E. Research Station at the Antarctic". A most in-
formative educational and humorous presentation which had us spell-
bound a few years ago-. You have been warned ! Don't miss it !!
- Sun 19 SHONGWENI DAM: Leader Steve Watson. Tel (H) 214512. Different
route to last one. Dep. Durban 08h00. Pinetown 08h30.
Members R7. Visitors R8.
- 18 / 19 BONA MANZI TREE HOUSES: Hluhluwe Area. Day hikes from unusual
accommodation. Leader Liz Young. Tel (H) 812839.
- Sun 26 VERNON CROOKS: Leader Tom de Waal. Tel (H) 474766. New hike
along the Mthakati circuit. Dep. Pinetown 07h30. Durban 08h00.
Members R8. Visitors R9.
- 25 /26 CLIMB BAMBOO MOUNTAIN: Strenuous day hikes from comfortable accommo-
dation (Restmount). LEADER Bruce Medway. Tel (H) 235895.

DECEMBER 1989

- 2 / 3 GXALINGENWA CAVE: Tents for Friday night. Leader Tom de Waal.
Tel. (H) 474766.

D I A R Y : Late entries:

- Nov. 4 VALLEY OF 1000 HILLS ; Hike & Braai. Lovely hike for + 3 hours
then braai at hotel. Braai packs and salads @ approximately R6
and drinks available from hotel. Leader Bill Hyslop. Tel (H) 214512.
Dep. Durban 1 p.m. Pinetown 1.30 p.m.
- 14-21 Nov. FLYING ADVENTURE: Fly to Casino - Hike to Waterfall Bluff.
Leader Bruce Medway. Tel (H) 235895. Maximum 9 people.
Closing date for booking 16 October 1989. Cost R130.

CONTINUATION OF KAAPSCHIE HOOP & FANIE BOTHA (SOUTH) TRAILS 10 / 18 JUNE

ACT II

Kaapsche Hoop Trail (Monday - Wednesday):

Act II actually begins on Sunday evening when we deposited ourselves in one of the two railway coaches, now wheel-less and marooned among pines, near the Berlin Forest Station, and slept.

The trail runs essentially around the perimeter of the high Kaapsche Hoop plateau so that there are frequent panoramic views over surrounding valleys and down into bushy but often pine-invaded kloofs that carves especially into the plateau's Western edge. On day one the views were not infrequently of, or tainted by, SAPPI's melodorous Ngodwana paper mill; whilst days two and three offered distant views of Baberton and the Swaziland. On the second day we passed a dramatically large sink-hole, full of forest; more time to explore would have been welcome, but we were skipping an overnight stop at Berlin and making speed for Coetzeestroom Hut. In fact, the trail is promoted as a "geological route", but one learns disappointingly little from the sketchy notes on the back of the Peter Slingsby trail map and there are not specially designated 'geological observation points' for which specific notes could have been supplied. The trail cries out for some such provision. Such points are, indeed, both marked and numbered on Slingsby's map, but nowhere is any information given about them !

At Coetzeestroom Hut - less attractive but no less welcome a sight at the end of a long walk than the ex-forester's house at Wattles had been the previous evening - I was beaten to the shower by my more ruthless companions, who made the best of the woodburning boiler's barely de-chilled offerings. By mid-evening, however, when I finally got to have my turn, it was into its stride, and I enjoyed a shower of veritable Turkish proportions. The shower room remained hot for so long afterwards that I was also able to dry and dress in warm humid comfort! This proves again the old proverb "He who showers last, showers pinkst".....

On the third day we passed through the old mining village of Kaapsche Hoop. Expectations of a trip back in time were rather disappointed. Some dilapidated ruins on a patch of overgrown waste ground that was, we assumed, Commissioner Square, the one-time hub of administrative activity, were difficult to get at and largely unrewarding to reach. Amid the two or three modern houses and drab straggle of mostly nondescript smaller dwellings, imagination had to work overtime to generate any feeling that here was the site, a century ago, of a frenetic digger community. The graveyard, half a kilometre distant, where the dead all face towards their old village, had all the atmosphere.

The whole plateau is largely planted to pine and most of the trail was through, alongside or within constant sight of plantations. This, for my money, takes the edge off one's enjoyment, but there are plenty of compensations, and the trail is certainly to be recommended. Take along a tame geologist though!!

INTERVAL

From Kaapsche Hoop village we walked the few kilometres to the Barretts railway coaches, lunched and drove back to Waterval Boven. Another glorious showering session, followed by a five-course blow-out down the road at Waterval Boven. The lounge and bar at the Wayside Inn are quaint than the diningroom but it's all quite recommendable. Next morning we drove off to Sabie via a brief 'historical' stop and drive about in Lydenburg.

ACT III

Fanie Botha Trail (Thursday - Saturday):

The first day is a short and unremarkable 8 km walk along plantation roads. But its end point, The Maritzbos Hut, is set at the entrance to a splendidly wooded valley. Because a lowering sky threatened to wash us off the next day's preferred route, Dick and I (the others giving in to the lure of hot tea and soft mattresses) went out to look at Lizzie's legs. We found them enchanting and only the approaching darkness persuaded us to come away.

Happily, the next day was dry (if dull) and so the whole party was able to share the delights of Lizzie's Legs - a stretch of lichen-festooned indigenous forest in which the path crosses and recrosses Lone Creek on a series of (?/4) makeshift stone and plank bridges. This was arguably the most attractive section of the entire week's hiking. It gave way to an extremely steep ascent through more pines (inevitably!) until at last we emerged onto a jeep track below Mt. Anderson.

This track contoured for seven or eight scenic kilometres across mountain grassveld and through a cold wind that ripped around us like thrown handfuls of rusty razor blades! It (and we) arrived at Hartebeestvlakte Hut around lunch-time, chilled, but gratified to see the sturdy stone chimney built onto the end of the hut that signified an end to incipient hypothermia! Less gratified, on entering to find the fireplace walled up!!

In fitful sun, after lunch, Dick and Regina strolled off to check out a building enticingly marked on the map "Potato Board". It proved to be an empty shed. Serves 'em right! Di and I went off to check out the Blyde Falls, which are pretty but difficult to get to and see. These falls are the first scenic gesture the Blyde River makes after its birth in the veld below Mt. Anderson. John, meantime, lay down on a bunk with a newspaper to stop the hut blowing away while we were out.

The next day a long descent along forest jeep tracks brought us back, soon after lunch, to our starting point (and cars) at Ceylon Forest Station. Although we'd had a brief brush with descending mist earlier on, it wasn't until we were actually loading our packs into the cars that the first whisperings of rain were felt. Masterful timing, Dick!

As with Kaapsche Hoop, one could regret the spoilation achieved by forestry along the trail, but the grandness of the scenery makes up for this. On the Maritzbos - Hartebeestvlakte leg, indeed, forestry's intrusion is relatively small.

EPILOGUE

Dick said he wanted to show us a church in Pilgrims Rest. Rightly suspicious we nonetheless drove dutifully through rain, as bidden, to ... the Royal Hotel where an old wood-and-iron church building bought in and brought from Lorenzo Marques last century now serves as the bar. A couple of beers and a brief saunter later we returned to Sabie and the (very attractive) Sabie Star chalets. Dick cooked a farewell meal (the next morning's breakfast doesn't really count). There was spirited debate about who owed how much cash to whom - the single bath was much patronised, but as the evening and the beer slowly ran out, so too did our holiday.

My thanks to Dick and Regina for rescuing me for a week from Jo'burg's coils, and to Di and Jack for helping to make our party a congenial one.

ANYONE FOR THE BLYDE RIVER CANYON TRAIL ??

BRIAN CULROSS

4 Rhodes Court,
270 Vause Road,
Durban,
4001

7th August, 1989.

The Editor,
Durban Ramblers Hiking Club,

Four days at the end of June/beginning of July were used to climb Thaba Ntlenyane from Vergelegen and return via Kaula Cave and Burnera Ridge. Birds Nest Cave was used as base for the climb.

The road from Himeville to the Vergelen turnoff is fairly unpleasant - having too large stones on the surface, and the Vergelegen road is worse with very low speeds being necessary to avoid damage to one's car. The party of three leaving Durban on the Thursday morning were only able to depart at 7-30am since Audrey had worked Wednesday night.

After an unhurried drive to Underberg, we arrived at the lovely thatch cottage where the other three had spent the preceding couple of days with wives and kids.

Following fortification with tea/coffee and biscuits we dragged the men away from the support party and the trip began. The walk to Birds Nest Cave was easily accomplished with a couple of hours of daylight left for organising beds and dinner.

Since the objective for Friday was to walk the sum of the hills between Durban and Johannesburg and back again within about thirty kilometres (the process starting at Jhb altitude and rising to twice that), an early start was called for, especially since it was one of the shortest days of the year.

Our only stops were for food and drink, and the top of the escarpment was reached after about 3,5 hours - some of the party getting their first glimpse of the highest point in Southern Africa - and no doubt thinking "piece of cake". Walking, eating, gasping, thoughts of giving up etc. occupied the next 3,5 hours but eventually the summit was reached just on the deadline of 2pm when we should have started for "home". We spent about 10 minutes admiring the view and trying to get out of the icy blast then set off as fast as we could for the relative warmth and comfort of our cave. Failing light urged us onwards but we were not to get "home" until half an hour after nightfall.

Saturday dawned heavily overcast with rain causing us to delay our start. When the clouds did begin to break up we could see that the 'berg had been covered in a heavy snowfall, and we eventually set off with the grass virtually dry, in brilliant sunshine, for Kaula Cave at about 11.40 am.

There were seventeen Eland at the sulphur spring which let us get to within about 70 metres before departing.

An hour or so later the mist returned and the question of finding the cave in these conditions arose.

On arriving at the approximate area of the cave we started checking the valleys, which all looked very similar in the restricted visibility.

With only about half an hour of daylight left, we had not found the cave and decided to sleep in a disused path a few metres below the main path. We all had "Space Blankets" in case of any mist problems in Lesotho so we did not have any worries unless the weather turned absolutely diabolical. After spending some time lying on my back looking at the stars and satellites with binoculars, I decided to try to get a weather report and switched on my pocket radio. The HI FI quality of the music from the headphones was absolutely staggering. Here we were lying in the wilderness, with nothing between us and the sub-zero air, and space but our sleeping bags and "Space Blankets" and at the touch of a tiny switch one was overwhelmed by the luxury of FM radio, which had never before sounded so good.

Between 9pm and midnight the "Space Blankets" and all the kit on the grass around us became covered in frost, but by 3am it had all evaporated and Sunday was a perfect day.

There was now no difficulty finding the cave but notes - mental and written were made to ensure that this cave may be found even in mist in future.

The final leg - exploration of a route down Burnera Ridge was broken by many stops to admire to 'berg under its mantle of snow, with great clouds of it occasionally being blown over the edge of the escarpment. We decided to descend via kwa Mamjwaha rather than Thibani because the rock bands looked far less formidable, and the view on both sides of the ridge into the Mkomazi and Bholi valleys further justified this route. Vergelegen was reached after six hours of walking, eating and admiring our surroundings.

About ten Eland were seen on the last day, bringing our total sightings to about thirty for the four days.

Philip Gatenby

AMAJUBA EXPLORATION 14 - 16 JULY 1989:

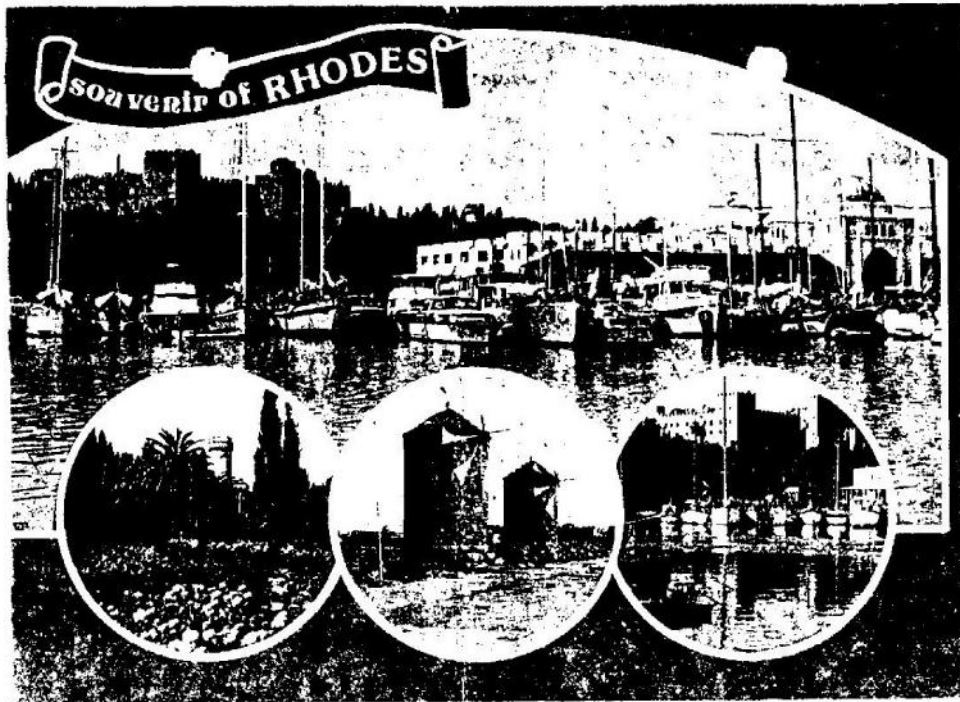
On 27th February 1881, not the calling of doves, but the whine and smack of lead filled the air above Amajuba Hill, in a climax to four weeks of manoeuvres and bloody skirmishes that are generally referred to as the "First Anglo-Boer War". Small beer as wars go (Boer dead totalled 30 : these days we can slaughter as many or more on the roads OF A SINGLE Easter Monday), it nonetheless cast a long shadow over future relationships - political and military - between Boer and Brit. It also provided the theme for another Dick Billiet "Special": tracing out the Amajuba campaign on the ground. Invited along, as I thought, for the pleasure of my company and the benefit of my Weekly Mail, I quickly discovered that my presence had far more to do with providing the following essay(And we all thank you for it - please keep it up !! Editor.)

There's a hostel at the foot of Amajuba, more or less on the site of Joubert's laager, which provides kitchen, electric light, hot showers, adequate bunks and an open log fire. Arriving severally on Friday evening, each in his own private dust cloud, we brushed up our history and planned for the morrow: in essence a chronological re-tracing of the British manoeuvres.

And so, next morning, we began by strolling along the crestline at Laing's Nek. Shallow traces of Boer trenches were discernable, though far more obvious were the foundations of more elaborate fortifications created by the British in 1900. (As the area was occupied during both Anglo-Boer Wars, interpretation of visible remains has to be conducted with some caution). On a small spur - Brownlow's or Engelbrecht's Kop, according to which side you're on - three or four platforms of whitewashed, cross-surmounted stones mark the communal graves where the dead of the 58th Regiment were gathered and dumped. When they panted and scrambled their way up that deadly hillside at about 10 o'clock one sunny morning a hundred years ago, Joubert's Boers had a perfect field of fire across summer grass. Now the graves and the killing ground have been swallowed up by wattle thickets, as has so much of Natal. (As recently as 1977, the wattle industry was prepared to pooh-pooh suggestions that their pet tree posed anything more than an occasional and marginal problem!)

After failing to push the Boers out of their positions on the Nek, astride the road to the Transvaal, Major-General Sir George Pomeroy Colley retired to Mount Prospect, his advance camp below Inkwels Hill. Here he sat down to await the progress of peace negotiations, but after ten days felt obliged to foray southwards to clear increasingly aggressive Boer patrols off his supply route from Newcastle. Breasting the gentle rise of Skuinshoogte, he bumped up against a strong Boer presence, set up a defensive position (with almost no cover) and was promptly surrounded. Darkness eventually rescued the survivors from their ordeal and during the night they struggled back to Mount Prospect. Though today one can stroll at will across the battlefield there are few features which help to bring the action to life - and in truth, it was a pretty static affair. A monument, a small redoubt (post-battle?) and three small clusters of graves: the imagination has to work hard to picture General Colley trying desperately to retain some sort of control over his command from behind the shelter of a dead horse, with Boer bullets scything through the air just above his head.

After Skuinshoogte we broke briefly with chronology, and travelled forward in time to O'Neill's cottage. This small stone-built cruciform dwelling, where peace terms were negotiated after Amajuba, is attractively maintained, though bare inside save for a cast-iron fireplace, modern wallpaper, and museum display boards. The family graveyard behind the cottage contains interesting examples of headstones professionally shaped but less expertly incised - presumably by some local amateur.



Rhodes, Greece, 3 July 1952
 The Greek islands are a beautiful sight, especially the Dodecanese islands (the twelve islands), following the Turkish border in 1913. Even during a day trip to Turkey, one should be the most island of the group, a day hoping not to be expected by the crowds of people by the hotel and the beach. The backpack is a most excellent piece of equipment following a visit to the island with interest in the "Voice of the Islands" which is a collection of stories of the islands, both in Greek and in English. It is a most interesting book, especially for the history of the islands, including the prehistoric sites, the old ports, and the old

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