



Fixtures List & Magazine: October-December 2016

CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER–4th Quarter 2016

This time of year is a fun one, and I encourage you to join us for the SOCIALS this quarter (see end of fixtures list).

The Annual End of Year Party is always a hoot – and our way of celebrating an excellent year of hiking and friendship and laughter.

Please also see that we have the AGM on 13.10.2016, and if YOU would like to help on the 2017 Committee, please let me know on chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za before the 06.10.2016.

The Annual Photo Competition is our premier photographic awards evening of the year, and is well worth attending, if not for the photographic education you'll get, but for the epic scenery that is on view for you that night.

In this mag, we have the story of the death-defying moments of Farouk and his snow and ice-bound hiking team. Also, we have introduced a new section to the mag: "Hiking Boo-boo's and How to Fix Them..." (If you have had a near disaster whilst hiking e.g. a serious fall, health issue, injury or animal attack, please send your story to chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za and you may get published!)

Thanks to ALL our members, our hike leaders and the MBC committee for another memorable year. Being Chairman to this amazing club is truly a privilege, and I am very grateful for the friendships and support from you all.

Happy Hiking. SEE YOU OUT THERE...

Karen Miller
Chairman: Mountain Backpackers Club

MOUNTAIN BACKPACKERS CLUB COMMITTEE 2016

Chairman	Karen Miller	chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za
Vice Chairman	John McGovern	082 659 5111
Treasurer	Bobby Stanton	031 465 5535
Fixture List / Magazine	Andy Brown	072 101 2498
Marketing	Heidi Cox	082 706 4283
Committee member	Alan Etchells	082 398 4103
Social media	Brett Bentley	
New member mentorship	Sorin Dimitriu	084 681 8920
Recruitment	Roy Bowden	082 901 5301
Student/youth liaison	Amy Grantham	
Leadership liaison	Jacqui Kennedy	083 399 9255
Secretary / admin: (paid position)	Philip van Gass	083 440 1651

Fax: 086 504 3382

Website: www.mountainbackpackers.co.za

Email: info@mountainbackpackers.co.za

MEMBERSHIP FEES FOR 2016

Single memberships: R220

Family membership: R280

(50% Reduction in Fees are offered from October to November 2016)

(Joining up in December will be at the 2017 rate, but will include December and all 2017.)

If you have not done so already, kindly pay your 2016 MBC Fees as soon as possible.

Please pay by EFT and NOT cash deposit or cheque at the bank! (The bank charges are prohibitively expensive).

Should you wish to pay cash, please pay the Chairman/committee member at one of the Socials (and make sure you get a receipt!) and we will process your payment with the administrator.

If you do pay by EFT, please give us a meaningful reference –surname, name and membership number is ideal.

Please EFT your payment to:

FNB - Westville Branch

Account Name: MOUNTAIN BACKPACKERS CLUB

Account No: 50780007264 Branch code: 223526

THE GRADING OF HIKES

1. Very easy trip.
2. Easy trip.
3. Moderate trip – Hiking fitness required.
4. Strenuous trip – Backpacking fitness required.
5. Very strenuous trip- High degree of physical fitness essential.

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

FIXTURE LIST – 4th QUARTER

October 2016

Date	Description	Dist / Height	Leader	Contact	Grd
8 Oct	AFRICAN FISH EAGLE TRAIL: Lots of birdlife, walk through Beachwood Mangroves and along North bank of Umgeni river, meet at Green Hub Durban @ 08h00 & leave 08h15. Bring cash for tea at Springfield SPCA 1/2 way. Confirm attendance by Wed 5 Oct please. Rain stops play.	13km	Heidi Cox	heidi.dinan@gmail.com 0827064283	2
14-15-16 Oct	Hodgson's twin peaks 3251 and 3256m. From Sani Top border post. Meet at Sani Lodge (bottom) back packers Friday evening. Up Sani Pass early and walk Hodgson's on Saturday. Overnight Sani Mountain Lodge (top) back packers. Return Sunday.	16km Round trip. 350m	Andy Brown	Tel; 072 101 2498 E-mail: andybza@gmail.com	3
15 Oct	Please note: 4x4 or good ground clearance vehicle required. Transport / lift sharing will be coordinated. Kloof Gorge. Hikes depart 08.30am. Ezemvelo car park, Kloof falls Rd. Route will be decided on the day according to weather conditions, hikers experience, number of hikers etc. For more info phone John on the Friday prior to the hike	?	John McGovern	082 659 5111	2
29-30 Oct	McKenzies Cave located in the Mkhomazi area of the Drakensberg.	22km 640m	Farouk Omarjee	031-577 6336 081 530 8447 farouko@telkomsa.net	3

November 2016

Date	Description	Dist / Height	Leader	Contact	Grd
4-5-6 Nov	Injasuti Camp Site: Tenting weekend. Day hikes for beginners and people unsure of their fitness. Arrive Friday or Saturday morning optional! Tents required.	?	Clive Powell	031 564 6169 Ah 083 303 4778 clive.glynis@gmail.com	2
5-6 Nov	Monks Cowl to Injasuthi Camp via Wonder Valley cave and houses. Meet at Monks Cowl 8am sharp to arrive at Injasuthi before shop closes. Commitment and deposit required by 21 October to secure booking.	35km 400m	John and Christine Pickup	christinebro3@gmail.com 082 782 6025	3
8-11 Nov	Drakensberg Gardens - Cottage - 3 nights MID-WEEK. Fully equipped and very comfortable. Beautiful area in the heart of the mountains. Max 10 members. Day hikes from cottage or simply unwind on the property (10 acres). Full DSTV for news & Sport etc. Hot baths and showers. Combined with other clubs. Please book early to secure your place. First come and paid first served. Last bookings by 30 Sept as we are away from 6 Oct to 1 Nov. Cost R100 pppn. Total R300	12-18km per day	Keith Ashton	033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	2
12-13 Nov	Injasuthi area. Marble Baths Cave Drakensberg.	16km 460m	Farouk Omarjee	031-577 6336 081 530 8447 farouko@telkomsa.net	3
13 Nov	Beach Walk: Umdloti to Umhlanga and lunch at Bush Tavern (please confirm so I can book). 12.5km on sand, meet at 08h00 start at 08h15 Umdloti Beach carpark. NB *river crossing, bring dry clothes in case. Confirm attendance by Mon 7 Nov please. Rain stops play.	12.5km	Heidi Cox	heidi.dinan@gmail.com 0827064283	2
19-20 Nov	Monks Cowl area. Stable Cave (by popular request) via Steilberg return by Jacobs Ladder. Meet at Dragon Peaks resort Friday night (camping) or early Saturday morning. (optional) Kloof Gorge. Hikes depart 08.30am. Ezemvelo car park, Kloof falls Rd.	18km 500m	Andy Brown	Tel; 072 101 2498 E-mail: andybza@gmail.com	3
19 Nov	Route will be decided on the day according to weather conditions, hikers experience, number of hikers etc. For more info phone John on the Friday prior to the hike	?	John McGovern	082 659 5111	2

27 Nov	Howick Meander - Local day hike - Symmonds Stream Conservancy, Beacon Hill Conservancy, along the Umgeni River to Howick Falls - option to the bottom of the falls - several local eateries for food & drinks at the end of the hike - note the distance & grade - Combined hike with other clubs - last bookings by Wed eve. 23 Nov. Cost R20 for conservancies.	16km	Keith Ashton	033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	2
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December 2016

Date	Description	Dist / Height	Leader	Contact	Grd
10-11 Dec	Cathedral Peak area. Tenting above Sherman's Cave. Tents required.	11km 500m	Farouk Omarjee	031-577 6336 081 530 8447 farouko@telkomsa.net	3
17-18 Dec	Cobham Area. Nutcracker / Lakes cave via Nhlabeni valley. Returning via Policeman, Titty, Whaleback and eSiphongweni rock art.	15km per day. 500m	Andy Brown	Tel; 072 101 2498 E-mail: andybza@gmail.com	3
31 Dec to 2 Jan	Bushman's Nek Hut- CELEBRATE NEW YEAR IN STYLE IN A STUNNING AREA - Short (just over 1.4 km) backpacking to Bushman's Nek Hut for a two-night stay.- Beautiful day hikes from this base to see waterfalls, bushmen's paintings, caves & lovely pools for swimming. Hut has lockable rooms with bunk beds & mattresses + flush toilets & showers (only cold water but no problem) - Combined hike with other clubs. Don't forget your drinks & goodies -Please book early to secure your place (Option also to stay 3-nights) - last bookings by 16 Dec. Cost R120 pppn	20km 1200m	Keith Ashton	Tel: 033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	2

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.

Advance Notices

Date	Description	Dist / Height	Leader	Contact	Grd
13-22 Jan 2017	Casino to Casino Durban's Sun Coast casino to Port Edward's Wild Coast casino	200km	Christine Pickup	Cell: 0827826025 Email: christinebro3@gmail.com	4
April 2017	The Grand Traverse 2017 Please advise interest EARLY so we can plan ahead.	220km	Andy Brown	Tel; 072 101 2498 E-mail: andybza@gmail.com	5
1 – 10 th Sept 2017 (+ extra days for travel)	TANKWA CAMINO. Walk from Calvinia to Ceres. Cost R5500.00 includes meals, camp spot, fellowship, support vehicle, water, transport back to Calvinia & more. Please see website www.tankwacamino.com , for all information. Deposit required on registering. Please advise when you register, so that we can plan shared transport.	50km 1520m	Christine Pickup	Cell: 0827826025 Email: christinebro3@gmail.com	4

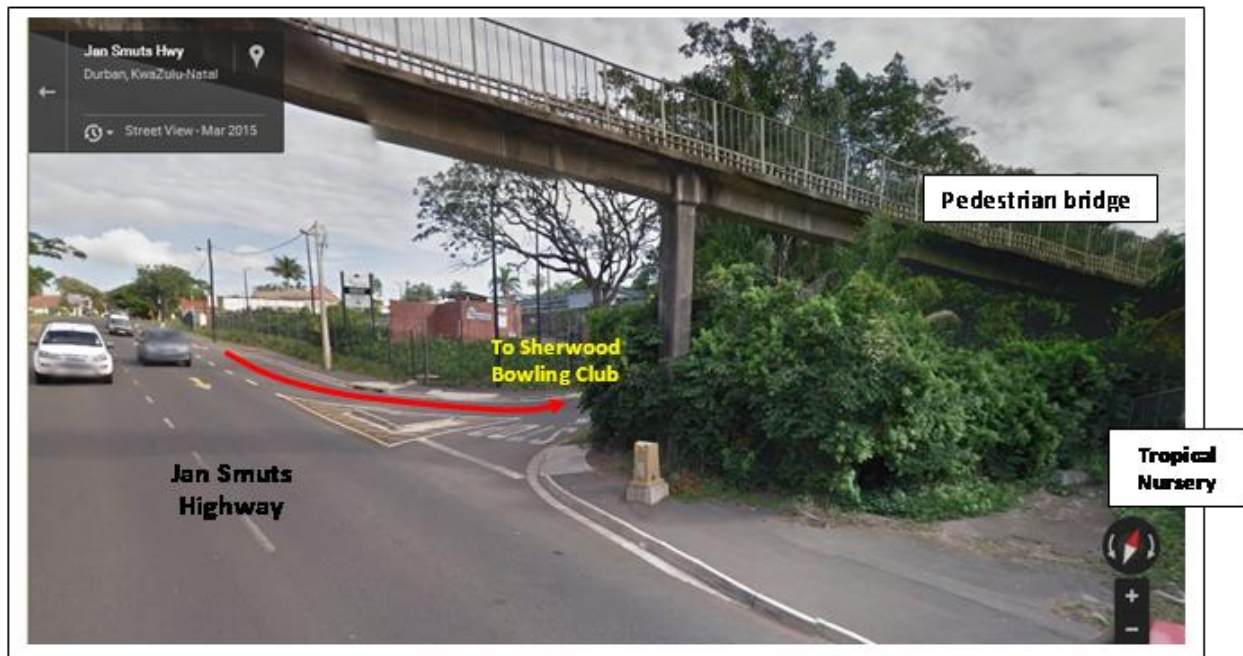
SOCIAL CALENDAR – PLEASE NOTE THE VENUE

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 under the pedestrian bridge and at the first traffic lights take a right U-turn to join the opposite lane, drive down and turn left just before the pedestrian bridge, up this narrow lane for about 200m and then turn left through the gate into the Bowling Club parking.

From Westville - take the M13 towards Durban, past Westwood Shopping centre, through 45th Cutting traffic lights, down Jan Smuts Highway, turn left just before the pedestrian bridge, up this narrow lane for about 200m and then turn left through the gate into the Bowling Club parking.

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 under the pedestrian bridge and at the first traffic lights take a right U-turn to join the opposite lane, drive down and turn left just before the pedestrian bridge, up this narrow lane for about 200m and then turn left through the gate into the Bowling Club parking.



SOCIAL CALENDAR

MBC Socials normally take place every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month.

MBC Socials for 4th quarter 2016

13 October	AGM: the meeting will be preceded by snacks and boerie or salad/cheese rolls. Snacks served from 6.30pm for a 7.15pm AGM start. Please RSVP to chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za for catering purposes by Monday 10.10.2016.
27 October	Photo Competition: An Annual MBC photographic bonanza presented to our members by Maggie and Wendy of the Bluff Camera Club, as always! The photos are shown in a slide show format, and each is given a critique from our beady-eyed experts.

10 November	Andre Rutishauser – Ship’s Captain for Sea Shepherd. Andre will present on the work done by Sea Shepherd for the government of Ghana. Some deep insights into environmental consequences of illegal fishing, and how we can help this problem
24 November	End of year party: Another epic Annual MBC event. Come and join your hiking friends as we regale the stories of 2016, and enjoy a yummy dinner. Please RSVP for this event by 10.11.2016 for catering purposes. Email chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za . Visitors/non-members are welcome at a cost of R70pp. Members attend for free. Cash bar available.
8 December	Rob Bentley: “On board our yacht “Shayile”, a 38 ft Maxim catamaran, my family and I set off from Durban in 2005, returning 4 years later. We cruised the East coast of Africa, the Indian Ocean Islands, India, South East Asia, Indonesia and finally Australia. The presentation outlines special places visited and life aboard a yacht with my wife and 2 young kids, and hopefully inspires others to “cast off” and go explore the world!”
22 December	No social

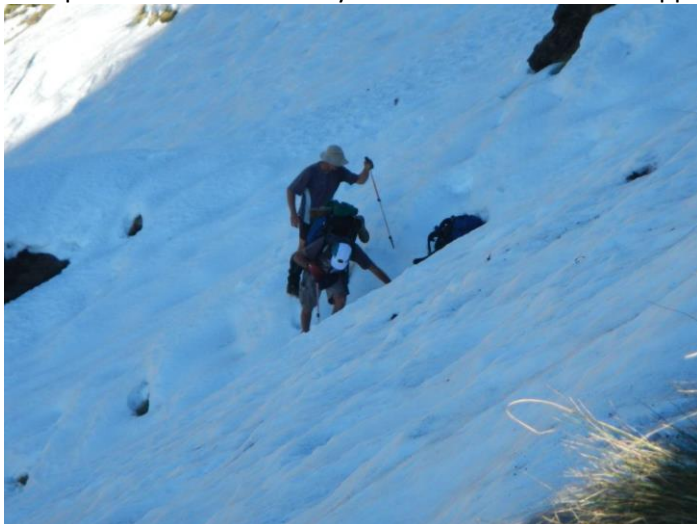
REPORTBACKS FROM RECENT CLUB HIKES

Break out the Crampons and Ice Axes. Visiting Mafadi.

Five of us started off from the Injisuthi Camp on the 6/8/16 for a four day hike up Leslie’s Pass onto the escarpment. Once on the top we were supposed to visit Mafadi the highest point in South Africa and then return down Judges Pass.



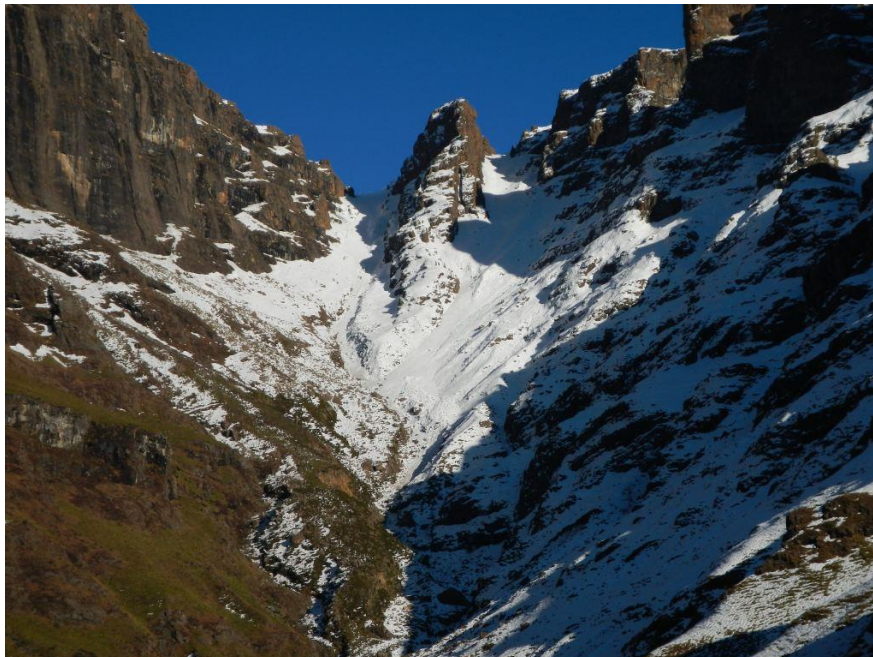
We camped at the bottom of Leslie's Pass on the first night. On the second day, two of our party pulled out due to exhaustion. The remaining three of us continued to climb up a ridge that led into Leslie's Pass. Once we reached the top of the ridge we had to traverse a snowy slope. Halfway across the snow-covered slope the drama started. The soft snow turned into ice and the two of us who didn't have crampons found it extremely difficult to move in the slippery conditions.



There was a point when one of my hiking poles slipped out my hand and slid down the mountain and I was gripped with fear as I depended on my poles to prevent me from suffering the same fate as my hiking pole. Greg our hike leader had crampons on and had to “rescue” us by cutting foot holds in the ice so we could get out and back onto the ridge where we had come from. We decided that discretion was the better part of valour and cancelled the climb onto the escarpment.



We spent the second night at the bottom of Leslie’s Pass. On the third day, Bruce headed back to Injasuti Camp where Peter and Keith were waiting for him. Greg and I set up camp next to Marble Baths and then spent the afternoon exploring different route back to Injisuthi Camp.



On the way back to our vehicle on the last day, we visited the Grindstone Caves. Although we did not complete the route originally planned, we enjoyed the four days in the mountains as the weather was perfect for hiking and the views as spectacular as always.

Farouk

The MBC Mountain Backpackers Club Campout. Cobham 26-27-28 August

This year's campout could easily have got off to an inauspicious start. Friday afternoon saw the N3 temporarily closed at Hilton. The gate at Cobham was inadvertently locked too early by Charl's staff and Saturday morning saw the Underberg road near Bulwer closed due to another accident. However, all these minor setbacks were patiently overcome by a magnificent turnout of thirty-eight happy campers.

Friday evening witnessed plenty of revelry by the campfire with the usual suspects, Clive, Bobby, Barry and Andy burning the midnight logs.



Saturday morning saw a good turnout of twenty-five surprisingly sprightly hikers ready to tackle a 16km hike led by Andy and Clive to see the amazing Bushman paintings atop of eSiphonhweni. After a pleasant 5km stroll along the Polela river we started the steady pull up the gully leading to the plateau. Either the gradient or Friday nights activities started to take its toll on a few walkers who decided to head back to the comforts of the camp site.

The fifteen that persevered were rewarded with a huge collection of some of the best rock art in South Africa. A few hyperactive souls even traversed the upper rock band to summit the mountain. The return trip was broken at the river to cool off and “enjoy” the freezing rock pools.

Whilst the majority of the hikers had been away Bobby and a few late risers had gone bundu bashing up Ndlovini in search of the long overgrown path to Pinnacle Rock.

Saturday night saw even more revelry and several gallons of “OBS” consumed to wash down the cremated marshmallows and steaks. Our volunteer fire builder Alice was also doing her best to get through the 100kgs of firewood we had brought. Again the same usual suspects were left putting the world to rights into the wee small hours.



Sunday morning saw a rather more subdued crowd gather for some “fun” prize-giving and a choice of two hikes. A short hike to enjoy some more low-lying Bushman painting at Pholela shelter or a hike up to Dolerite Sill via Trout Beck and Bypass Ridge. Again a healthy turnout of twenty-five souls for the latter. As we wandered along Trout Beck we were also treated to some herpetology lessons from our snake-wrangling friends Neil and Craig. On the way back many crazy hikers again dived into freezing mountain rock pools.

All in all, a great weekend well organised by our stalwarts Karen and Heidi. We had wonderful crisp sunny winter Berg' weather and not too many hangovers.



Unbeknown to most of us all our antics were being recorded by Tanya Jacobs who has compiled a charming short film of the weekend which is a “must-view” on YouTube at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPxwboim9g4>

Cheers Andy

HIKING BOO-BOO's: AND HOW TO FIX THEM

THE BOILING POT: by Neil Williamson

In November 2015 year a few friends and I took a trip to Giants Castle to spend a few nights in Sleeping Beauty Cave and do some hiking and climbing. On the 2nd night in the cave we began preparing our meals for the evening.

The area where we were camping had an uneven floor (as in most caves), and conditions were pretty cramped. I placed the camp stove on the ground and checked that it was stable. There were several pots on the go to accommodate for the large number of people that night.

As this pot came to the boil, the vibrations caused the camp stove to topple over, spilling the boiling water over my left foot. At the time I was wearing only socks on my feet.

Luckily there is an ice-cold berg stream running through the cave. I ripped my sock off and ran into the stream. I spent about an hour with my foot in the cold water, despite having crabs trying to eat me! A fellow hiker came to the rescue (Thanks James Voortman) in the form of some BurnShield. We applied the BurnShield dressing and held it in place with a bandage I then added a sock over this to keep everything in place.

By morning my foot felt uncomfortable but fine. I kept the dressing and sock on as we walked out that day, and I would then treat the wound under better conditions. Upon removing the dressing it was quite remarkable how the areas that we could not cover with the BurnShield were much worse than the covered area. Evident in the picture.



Post burn I treated the wound with Bactrazine. And within a week it was almost fully healed.

So, to conclude I recommend all hikers carry a few BurnShield dressings in their 1st aid packs. And be very careful when working with camp stoves!

A History of the Drakensberg.

Courtesy of Andy Brown. Material from zulu.org.za

The Geology or Geological Formation of the Drakensberg

The imposing Drakensberg escarpment as we know it is the product of millions of years of sculpting by the elements. The foundations of the mountain range reach back billions of years. Its formation provides a fascinating story, and its imposing rock walls and deep, green valleys have provided a home for an ever-changing variety of life through the ages.

Eons before the first lavas began to flow in the area of the present- day mountain range we call the Drakensberg, the place was part of a shallow depression fed by inland waterways. It was an enormous inland lake, the waters of which floated upon a vast area of an ancient land mass called Gondwanaland. This supercontinent included Africa, Australia, New Zealand, South America and Antarctica. The sediments carried into the lake were gently deposited upon granite foundations which had formed almost three billion years ago. Today, in areas such as Wit Umfolozi, Old Baldy in Valley of 1000 Hills and Kloof Gorge, small portions of these grandfather granites are exposed giving visual evidence of the ancestry of the landforms. These oldest of rocks are exposed nearest the coast where the elements have worked hardest to reveal their secrets.



The sediments of mud and sand were deposited for millions of years into the vast central swamp - a place where dinosaurs lived and died. They became agglomerated and compacted through the immense pressure caused by the weight of all the overlying layers. This thick blanket of sediment built up about 490 million years ago and today the resultant sandstone can be seen forming the typical table-top shapes in the Valley of 1000 Hills and around Oribi Gorge near Port Shepstone.

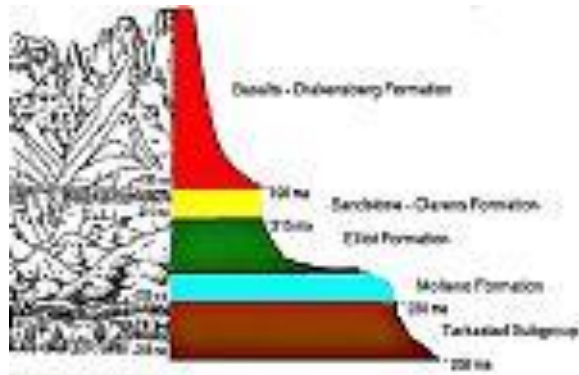
Through the next 250 million years, several more thick layers of sediment were deposited into the swampy depression. These sediments resulted in the formation of red, green and purple-coloured mudstones that contain rich fossil deposits of both carnivore and herbivore reptiles and of the vegetation they fed upon. However, during the deposition of what is known as the Beaufort Series of sandstones, life on earth all but disappeared. Fossil evidence shows that more than 90% of known species became extinct, but no one really knows why.

The next layer of sediments deposited over the Beaufort sandstones built up the blue and grey Molteno and red coloured Elliot formations about 200 million years ago. These form the small cliffs in the foothills of the Drakensberg. The layer is easily recognised due to the way it sparkles in the sun. The glistening is due to tiny quartz crystals, which form a cement between the sand grains. It was also the even Molteno layers that the Bushmen were to use as canvas for their art and even later was to be used by farmers to build their houses.

These layers also contain early dinosaur fossils. The footprints of these early creatures can be found in the sandstone caves of the Drakensberg foothills, often exposed on the ceilings where the softer sediment layers below them have been worn away.

Towards the end of the period during which these sandstones were deposited, a long period of desiccation occurred with the deposition being caused no longer by rivers, but by wind in a desert environment. These wind-blown deposits formed the Cave Sandstone and built up the massive sandstone cliffs which today run along the entire length of the Drakensberg sometimes reaching heights of 200 metres.

It was on top of these deposits that the Drakensberg mountain range was to grow, and it was partly the immense weight of all the sediments, which contributed to the massive breaking up of the landmass which occurred.



Some 160 million years ago, enormous internal pressures contributed to the cracking apart, breaking up and drifting away of the continents which once constituted Gondwanaland. This movement also resulted in enormous cracks in the crust of the African continent and it was through a series of these cracks or fissures that the massive lava flows which were to create the Drakensberg began. This was volcanic activity, but it was not of the explosive kind. Rather, the thick lavas flowed and cooled, flowed and cooled, adding from 30 cms to 50 metres of lava at a time from the fissures which occurred roughly where Lesotho is today. Throughout 20 million years these flows built up a deposit of basaltic rock over 1,5 kilometres thick in some places and covered an area extending from inland of present day Lesotho over most of KwaZulu-Natal as far as Mozambique and the Indian Ocean.

The basaltic lavas were far from solid, being riddles with holes from trapped gas bubbles and tubes where the hot bubbles escaped upwards. Later these spaces were filled with white zeolite minerals, resulting in the white inclusions called amygdalae, some of which are the beautiful blue, grey and white agates, chalcedony and quartz crystals which delight rock collectors and reward sharp-eyed hikers. In the lower reaches, ammonites existed at the same time as the mountain dinosaurs and both faced the same fate when, about 65 million years ago, a large meteorite impact contributed to their extinction.

At the same time as the fissure flows were adding a massive cap over the softer sandstones and shales, other flows which could not reach the surface were being forced into underground cracks and crevices. Unlike the brittle basalts of the cap layers these underground lavas formed hard blue dolerite dykes and sills throughout the area. The resistant horizontal sills resulted in time if the formation of land forms, usually waterfalls, such as Howick Falls.

In some places the doleritic dykes have eroded much faster than the surrounding rock, as is the case in the high Berg where it is surrounded by basalt, and this process created the Crack in the Royal Natal National Park area, and the pass at Bannerman's Pass in the Giant's area of the Drakensberg, amongst other features.

Once the massive flows of basalt lavas had cooled they were immediately exposed to the erosive forces

of wind, rain, ice, lightning, heat and drought. Where the elements broke through the basalt cap into softer layers, erosion was faster and caused steep sided valleys with churning rivers tumbling seawards. The erosion backwards to the present-day escarpment was a relatively rapid process - about 200 kms in 140 million years, or an average of 1,42 mm per year. Even so the Drakensberg lavas are resistant to erosion and form the high peaks of the escarpment as well as the protective capping of the little Berg.



The lava flows ceased about 140 million years ago and since then no more building up has occurred. Instead of deposition, erosion became the dominant force in the mountain paradise, forming the imposing peaks and steep sided valleys we know today. The high peaks and vertical walls were to issue an irresistible challenge to mountaineers, just as the hills and valleys would call to hikers, rewarding their efforts with opportunities to swim in clear icy pools and shower beneath refreshing waterfalls. Much was still to happen in these mountains before that time came to pass.

Through the centuries, the slow build up of fragile soils on the steep slopes provided a base for vegetation, food for the vast herds of game which roamed the grasslands. It was into this world that the little apricot-coloured hunters appeared and lived in the peace of this world which had arisen out of the swamp millions of years before.

The San people moved into the mountain paradise centuries ago, and certainly long before the Bantu-speaking people or the Europeans did. Recent discoveries of Namibian rock paintings are dated at more than 14 000 years old, suggesting that such rock art originated in Southern Africa, not Europe. These tiny nomadic artists roamed the southern plains and mountains, adapting themselves to all manner of environments, and recorded their experiences upon thousands and thousands of rock canvasses. They used paints prepared from iron oxides, charcoal, gypsum, ochre, and paintbrushes made of reeds, hairs and feathers. With these tools they created the rich and unique heritage left to those who came after.

The Stoneage San were people of the eland, and their culture was based on hunting these largest of antelope with bows and arrows. Their activities and beliefs were reflected on the walls of their shelters by their artists - the battles, the hunts, the animals and birds, the mythological beings, bees and fish, ladders and digging sticks, dances and families. Some of these paintings date as far back as AD 970, and

the most recent to around AD 1720-1820. And so the San people lived on in their mountain wilderness, enjoying the plentiful herds of buck, the clear waters of the highland streams, the music they made and their oneness with their world - and recorded it all on the plentiful canvasses of the Drakensberg sandstones.



However, the lives of peace and of harmony with the environment enjoyed by these little people were about to come to an end. The Nguni people were beginning to move onto higher and higher ground from their origins in the north, in turn pushing the San even higher into the Little Berg. Despite the initial fears which must have beset the San people, the new arrivals were pastoralists and the two ways of life did not interfere with one another.

Somewhere around the end of 1835 the noise of horses and wagons was heard for the first time in the foothills of the Quathlamba Mountains, as they were known to the Embo-Nguni. With the encroaching settlement of Voortrekkers amongst the foothills of the Drakensberg, serious trouble began and the very existence of the San people was threatened. These trekkers shot and poached in areas used by the Bushmen for centuries. Soon the San themselves were being shot.

Such raids against the San, thought of as stock thieves and vermin - hardly human - continued until around 1900. By the turn of the century tiny hunters had vanished and the mountains which had been their home was empty of the eland artists, never to see them again.

The mountains, from late in the 19th century, became an ever stronger magnet to those who sought peace, quiet, space and challenge - the first mountaineers claiming the first of those mighty freestanding Drakensberg peaks as their own around 1887. Sterkhorn, for example, was first climbed in 1888 by the Stocker brothers, who claimed several other peaks during that year. Even before that, mention has been made of those determined explorers who laboured to the top of several passes and were the first to see the green province laid out before them in all its spacious wonder (further information can be found on the Mountain Club of South Africa 's website: <http://kzn.mcsa.org.za/>).



The Natal National Park was established in 1916, changing its name to the Royal Natal National Park after a visit by the British Royal Family in 1947. The park included the area of some 7000 hectares below the majestic Amphitheatre and included the mighty Tugela Falls. Through time, more and more land along the length of the mountain range was added to the protected area, some by the Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board and some by the Department of Forestry. By late in the 20th century the majority of land along the length of the Drakensberg had become consolidated and was administered in its entirety by the Natal Parks Board. The Board later combined with the KwaZulu Department of Nature Conservation and the new KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service was formed. In the first year of the millennium, there was another change in the name and the organization became known as KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (further history can be found on their website: <http://www.kznwildlife.com>)

The Drakensberg was declared a World Heritage Site in 2000 by UNESCO. This honour bestowed upon the age-old mountain paradise, provided global recognition of a unique and special place, and was a fitting beginning to a new century of its history.



This article was compiled, with thanks, from the vast sources of information to be found in: A Field Guide to the Natal Drakensberg by Dave and Pat Irwin
A Cradle of Rivers - the Natal Drakensberg by David Dodds
A Climbers' Guide to Natal Rock by Roger Nattress
The Drakensberg Bushmen and Their Art by A Willcox
The Natal Monocline: explaining the Origin and Scenery of Natal, South Africa by Lester King
An Introduction to the Historical Geology of South Africa by J Truswell
Excerpts from an explanatory pamphlet from the University of Natal's geology museum with thanks to Deanna Meth
Steve Cooke, MCSA KZN Section Search & Rescue Convenor, personal communication
Ron Uken, Geologist, personal communication

Advertisements

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