



MOUNTAIN BACKPACKERS CLUB

Fixtures List & Magazine: January-March 2017

CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER

The Mountain Backpackers Club turns 30 years old in 2017!!!

The committee and hike leaders have planned some celebratory events and hikes for this rather epic occasion. We are so proud that the MBC has thrived for 3 decades, and been the meeting place and community of good friends, as well as provided so many opportunities for adventure, goal-achievement and personal development.

Welcome to a New Year filled with hiking opportunities for all abilities. There is even an opportunity for you to try your hand at Rock Climbing in February. We also have an off-site frogging/nunu evening in January, don't miss out!

Keep a beady eye on the MBC Facebook page and email for updates and announcements.

Please pay your subs if you haven't already. Huge thanks to those who have!

Enjoy the offerings of our leaders and our committee in this fixtures list...

We look forward to seeing you OUT THERE.

Happy Hiking.

Karen Miller
Chairman: Mountain Backpackers Club

MOUNTAIN BACKPACKERS CLUB COMMITTEE 2016

Chairman	Karen Miller	chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za
Vice Chairman	Andy Brown	072 101 2498
Treasurer	Bobby Stanton	031 465 5535
Fixture List / Magazine	Andy Brown	072 101 2498
Marketing	Heidi Cox	082 706 4283
Secretary	Amy Grantham and Brent Kloppers	amygrantham@futurenet.co.za
Social media	Karen, Heidi, Andy, Amy	info@mountainbackpackers.co.za
New member mentorship	Sorin Dimitriu	084 681 8920
Student/youth liaison	Amy Grantham	amygrantham@futurenet.co.za
Leadership liaison	Amy Grantham and Brent Kloppers	amygrantham@futurenet.co.za
Membership: (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 2017

Single memberships: R250
Family membership: R310

(50% Reduction in Fees are offered from September to November 2017)
(Joining up in December will be at the 2018 rate, but will include December and all 2018.)

If you have not done so already, kindly pay your 2017 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 elevation** as well as the **grading of the backpacking trip** you intend doing and ensure that your level of fitness is adequate.

FIXTURE LIST – 1st QUARTER

January 2017

Date	Description	Dist / Elevation	Leader	Contact	Grd
13-22 Jan	Casino2Casino: Hike with us along our magnificent coast from Sun Coast Casino to Wild Coast Casino stopping at various campsites along the way.	180km	John and Christine Pickup	christinebro3@gmail.com 082 782 6025 072 151 2031	4
14-15 Jan	30 Caves of the Southern Berg. Bushman's Nek. Tarn cave via Ostrich cave. Returning via Gargoyle cave and Vast Cave. (4 caves)	24km 700m	David Gay	031-7640298 (18h00 – 20h00 Mon-Thurs only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	4
21 Jan	Kloof Gorge. Hikes depart 07.30am. Ezemvelo car park, Kloof falls Rd. Route will be decided on the day according to weather conditions, hikers experience, number of hikers etc. Cancelled if raining. Bring snacks and water. For more info phone John by the Friday prior to the hike	?	John McGovern	082 659 5111	2
29 Jan	Howick. "The Amblers" new hike lovely views of Howick and area. Plenty of game and birdlife. 12 places book by 25 Jan. R20 p/p.	15km	Keith Ashton	033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	2

February 2017

Date	Description	Dist / Elevation	Leader	Contact	Grd
4-5 Feb	30 Caves of the Southern Berg. Garden Castle. Wave cave and Curtain cave via the old Sherry cave, returning via Secret cave, Engagement cave and Sleeping Beauty cave. (6 caves)	23km 580m	David Gay	031-7640298 (18h00 – 20h00 Mon-Thurs only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	4
5 Feb Sun	Midlands. Fort Nottingham. Hard climb from village to the Fort at the top of the valley. Excellent views from the top. Bring own water for the whole trip. Cost R20 p/p. Last booking 1 Feb.	14km	Dave Sclanders	Email only: dave@bergfree.co.za	3
11 Feb Sat	Gavin Raubenheimer of PEAK HIGH MOUNTAINEERING will host a beginner's rock-climbing morning at Monteseel Cliffs. 9am for briefing. BYO takkies (not boots or slops), sun protection, water and snacks. R300pp to be paid to Gavin on the day. You will be asked to sign an indemnity form.	UP!	Karen Miller will take bookings	chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za or kjmchiro@eject.co.za	UP!
11 Feb Sat	AFRICAN FISH EAGLE TRAIL: We'll be looking out for 30 things for our 30th anniversary year on this hike. Lots of birdlife, walk through Beachwood Mangroves and along North bank of Umgeni river, meet at Green Hub Durban @ 08h00 & leave 08h15. Rain stops Play. Bring cash for tea at Springfield SPCA 1/2 way.	13km	Heidi Cox	heidi.dinan@gmail.com 0827064283	2
11-12 Feb	Tenting hike. Garden Castle. Drakensberg. Follow the Giants Cup Trail from Garden Castle to Hidden Valley. Ideal for first time backpackers. Lovely pool next to the camp site. Bring your costume. <u>NB: Hiking tents required.</u>	12km 200m	Farouk Omarjee	031-577 6336 081 530 8447 farouko@telkomsa.net	3
18 Feb	Kloof Gorge. Hikes depart 07.30am. Ezemvelo car park, Kloof falls Rd. Route will be decided on the day according to weather conditions, hikers experience, number of hikers etc. Cancelled if raining. Bring snacks and water. For more info phone John by the Friday prior to the hike.	?	John McGovern	082 659 5111	2
18-19-20 Feb Or 17-18-19 Feb	COBHAM AREA: Three days 35km. Spectacle Cave and impressive Gxalingenwa Cave. Day one: Spectacle cave via Pholela valley. Day two: Steep hard climb to Hodgson's contour path via Fingall's Rock and on to Gxalingenwa cave . Day three. Downhill. Returning via Pinnacle Rock and Emerald Stream to Cobham.	Day 1 14km 400m Day2 8km 500m Day3 13km	Andy Brown	Tel: 072 101 2498 andybza@gmail.com	4

25-26 Feb	Highmoor. Midlands. Caracle cave. Exploration weekend. Looking for new cave site. Bring backpack, small day pack and extra water bottle / bladder. Great for FIT first time backpackers. Cost R70. Book by 22 Feb.	18km 300m	Dave Sclanders	Email only: dave@bergfree.co.za	3
25-26 Feb	30 Caves of the Southern Berg. Cobham: Weaver cave via Nutcracker cave, Lakes cave and Glade cave. Returning via Siphongweni rock caves. (6 caves)	28km 530m	David Gay	031-7640298 (18h00 – 20h00 Mon-Thurs only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	4

March 2017

Date	Description	Dist / Elevati on	Leader	Contact	Grd
10-11- 12 Mar	Injisuthi area. Tenting weekend. Friday optional. Day hikes for beginners	?	Clive Powell	031 564 6169 083 303 4778 Clive.glynis@gmail.com	2
12 Mar Sun	Howick Area. Umgeni Valley Nature Reserve. Day hike. Great views and plenty of game and bird life. Cost R30 p/p Last booking 8 March	15km	Keith Ashton	033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	3
18-19 Mar	Cave hike in the Injisuthi area of the Drakensberg. Climb Van Heyningen's Pass then across Shada Ridge to Wander Valley Cave. A beautiful pool with a waterfall is in the valley below the cave. Perfect for a dip.	20km 400m	Farouk Omarjee	031-577 6336 081 530 8447 farouko@telkomsa.net	3
18-21 Mar	30 Caves of the Southern Berg. Bushman's Nek Odyssey. (9 caves) Four days. Day 1: Bushmans cave via Halfway cave. Day 2: Mzimude cave via Saddle and Isicatula pass. Day 3: Whytes cave via Corncob cave and Walkers pass. Day 4: Return via White Horse Cave, Sherry cave, Painters cave and Langalibalele cave.	35km	David Gay	031-7640298 (18h00 – 20h00 Mon-Thurs only) cougar1@telkomsa.net	5
18-21 Mar	DIDIMA. Central Berg Traverse. Three days. Hotel to Xeni cave and Twins cave. Twins cave to Rolands cave and return via Camel.	37km 1817m	John and Christine Pickup	christinebro3@gmail.com 082 782 6025 072 151 2031	5
18-19 Mar	INJASUTI. Wander Valley Cave. Backpacking via Van Heyningen's pass. Ideal for less experienced backpackers. Lovely pools. Bring costume. Cost R70 p/p Book by 8 March.	24km	Keith Ashton	033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	
28-31 Mar	Drakensberg Gardens. Cottage. 3 Nights MID-WEEK. Days hikes from cottage or just relax. Fully equipped DSTV etc. Max ten people. Book early. Last booking 17 March. Cost R360 p/p total for three nights.	14km per day optional	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
April 2017	The Grand Traverse 2017 Please advise interest EARLY so we can plan ahead. Circa 15 to 28 April	220km	Andy Brown	Tel; 072 101 2498 E-mail: andybza@gmail.com	5
26 – 28 May. Fri-Sun	Mhlopeni Nature Reserve (near Greytown). SA Natural Heritage Site, Muden area, we may hit 30 degrees at this time of year – so wrap up warm! Self-catering camp (R150pp) and own tent (R80pp) accommodation available, can be chilly overnight. Guided hikes Saturday and Sunday beautiful bushveld, game and prolific birdlife. Pre-booking and payment essential: joy@mhlopeni.co.za	Guided day hikes	Heidi Cox	heidi.dinan@gmail.com 0827064283	2
1 – 10 th Sept 2017 (+ extra days for travel)	TANKWA CAMINO. FULLY BOOKED. 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
May 2017	I am a keen hiker from Australia, and would like to hike the 85 km Fish River Canyon Trail in Namibia from Hobas to Ais-Ais in May 2017. As there is a minimum of 3 hikers required for this trail, but there are only 2 of us, we are looking for a group we could join. This is NOT an MBC hike, just a call for hikers to join if they would like to.	85km	Andy (Andrea) Waluga	andywaluga@hotmail.com	



DURBAN RAMBLERS HIKING CLUB
Saturday and Sunday Hiking Programme
January 2017

Sat 14 Jan 2017 — Herbies Hike (Roosfontein)

Hike Leader: Werner 084 206 7836

Hike is through grasslands and some forest. Please ensure you bring enough water. **Meet at 13.45pm at the parking lot outside Westville Prison. R20 donation towards the upkeep of the reserve. Meet afterwards for drinks at the Pavilion. Grade 2 Moderate; 7km

Sun 15 Jan 2017 — Isipingo Circuit

Hike Leader: Jon Stevens 082 459 1522

Explore the beaches behind the old airport. A summer hike so bring your costume. Back by lunch. **Meet at 06:00am at the end of Calicut Place in Merewent overlooking the Umlaas Canal Cutting. Grade 2; Distance to be determined on the day.

Sat 21 Jan 2017 — Nqutu Falls Trail (KKNR)

Hike Leader: Ann 083 666 5630

This hike will follow a course down into the gorge and then back up again. BYO drinks and picnic for social afterwards at the lovely picnic site. **Meet 13:45pm at the Nqutu picnic site off Valley Road in Kloof. Entrance fee of R25. Grade 3 Strenuous; 7km

Sun 22 Jan 2017 — Gromor (Inchanga)

Hike Leader: Margie Forbes 073 437 6915

A moderate hike across Gromor land through the old railway nursery, across the railway bridge and back to Inchanga. **Meet in time for a prompt departure at 07:00am from Union Main Centre, 45 Old Main Road, Pinetown, or at 07:30am at Inchanga Station. Petrol sharing R20. Grade 2; 15km

Sat 28 Jan 2017 — Phezulu Safari Park (members only hike)

Hike Leader: Linda 083 353 8319

New Sat Hike! Please note this is a members only hike and will be a guided hike through the beautiful park. Drinks afterwards at the restaurant. R50pp entrance fee. **Meet and park at 13:30pm (note earlier time) at Phezulu Safari Park (5 Old Main Road, Botha's Hill). Grade 2 Moderate; approx. 8km

Sun 29 Jan 2017 — Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve

Hike Leader: Stella Wells 078 319 8979

This reserve situated about 12km inland of Umzinto has a wide variety of habitats (extensive grasslands, scarp forests, rivers, wetlands, cliff faces and dams) providing opportunity to see a wide range of wildlife and game. The turn-off for the reserve is approximately 12.5km from the N2 (Park Rynie/ Umzinto t/off) and the entrance gate is a further 6km. **Meet at 07:00am at Glenwood Village, 397 Che Guevara (Moore) Rd or at 08.00am at the reserve office/ reception. Petrol sharing R50; Entrance fee R30. Grade 2/3; 15km

MBC 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 1st quarter 2017

1	12.01.2017 OFF-SITE TOUR There will be NO meeting at the Sherwood Bowling Club this evening	A night walk/frogging evening at Tanglewood Private Nature Reserve in Kloof. It's a fantastic spot, and there's also the opportunity of seeing some nice mammals, such as White--tailed Mongoose and Porcupine.	RSVP's to chairman@mountainbackpackers.co.za ASAP or latest 07.01.2017. If you cannot get through, please email kjmchiro@eject.co.za . The time and directions will be given to RSVP'd attendees ahead of time.
2	26.01.2017	Benine du Toit A pictorial tour of the ascent of Mt Kenya. (Benine's photographs are NOT to be missed!)	

3	09.02.2017	New Members Evening Hosted by the MBC Committee, led by Sorin Dimitriu	New and existing members are welcome to attend. An introduction to aspects of hiking etiquette, equipment and an introduction to the club.
4	23.02.2017	Robert Sprouse Climbing and sight-seeing in central USA.	
5	09.03.2017	Errol Douwes. Errol and Jo recently returned from a long road trip, having enjoyed some lovely (guided) hiking in Kruger Park. Also some interesting day hikes near Magoebaskloof and at Modjadji Nature Reserve. Oh, and a guided walk in Mapungubwe.	
6	23.03.2017	To be announced (Keep an eye on Facebook or your email)	

SA Public Holidays...

- January 2017 – New Year’s Day
- 21 March 2017 - Human Rights Day
- 14 April 2017 – Good Friday
- 17 April 2017 – Family Day
- 27 April 2017 - Freedom Day
- 1 May 2017 - Workers Day
- 16 June 2017 - Youth Day
- 9 August 2017 - National Women’s Day
- 24 September 2017 – Heritage Day
- 16 December 2017 - Day of Reconciliation
- 25 December 2017 - Christmas Day
- 26 December 2017 - Day of Goodwill

REPORTBACKS FROM RECENT CLUB HIKES

Orange peel in the mist.

Six of us drove up to the Cathedral Peak area in the Northern Drakensberg for a weekend hike over the 10th and 11th December 2016.



It was a short five kilometres hike to our overnight spot at the bottom of the ridge that leads up to the gully known as the Orange Peel Gap. This was an ideal distance for first time backpackers. Our overnight campsite was on the popular route to the summit of Cathedral Peak.



The first day was cloudy and cool. The first kilometre and a half was fairly flat with a river crossing. Thereafter we climbed from an altitude of 1440m to 1955m above sea level. Not too difficult as one of the first timers on the hike managed it comfortably.



Three of our group spent the night in Sherman's Cave while the other three of us tented above the waterfall just beyond the cave. After setting up our tents and settling into the cave the group took a walk up the ridge towards Orange Peel Gap with the intention of taking in the views however after reaching the top of the very steep first section of the ridge it began to thunder with lightning and light rain so we returned to our tents and the cave. It rained the rest of the afternoon. We took this opportunity to relax and to get to know each other a little better.



We were hoping that the weather would clear up on Sunday morning so that we could complete our climb up to Orange Peel Gap before returning home but our hopes were dashed as it was misty and wet with poor visibility. On the way back down to the end of the hike the mist lifted a little allowing us to enjoy the views of the valley below. A relaxing hike which was enjoyed by our small group.



Thanks Farouk

Hodgson's in the Wind.

On Friday the 14th of October eleven assorted souls met at Sani Lodge ready to ascend Sani Pass and climb Hodgson's twin Peaks.



On Saturday morning at Sani top we were met by 70km/h Gale force 8 winds. Three of the party immediately ducked and headed for the sanctuary of the Sani Mountain Pub.



The remaining eight soldiered on fighting the wind across the Tsani Flats towards the North Peak. We quickly lost another two hikers who decided to head for the “relative” shelter of the cup.

We were literally blown up the mountain and standing on the summit was nigh on impossible.



One down and one to go, so off we headed down into the cup and off to the South Peak.



Fortunately, the rock scramble to the top was leeward so we safely summited where the wind abated long enough for a quick photo shoot.





On Sunday morning the six summiteers again braved the same winds to take a stroll along the Twelve Apostles on the edge of the escarpment.



We stayed far enough away from the edge to avoid a premature descent of Sani Pass.

All in all a challenging but great weekend. Kudos to Sarah, Lisa, Alan, Jason and William for summiting.

Cheers. Andy

Advertisements

HambaNathi - Walk with us"- Guided Wild Coast Hikes

HambaNathi offers guided hikes along the Wild coast, South Africa's most beautiful, wildest and most exciting stretch of coast. Camp on unspoilt beaches, swim in magical rock pools, see an abundance of marine and coastal life. All hikes are fully catered. Transport and last night's accommodation in Mbotyi are arranged.

Visit our Website at <http://www.wildcoasthikes.co.za> or phone 031 202 9994.

Southern Secrets Hiking and Backpacking

Discover some of the exquisite secrets of the Drakensberg Mountains and Lesotho, including visits to rock art sites, with a fully qualified and registered Mountain Guide (KZN0904) and Nature Guide (KZN1025). Single or multi-day trips.

Contact Philip or Christeen Grant 033 9971817 cell 0824179163/2 email pgrant@yebo.co.za or visit www.southernsecrets.co.za

Berg Free Adventures

David Sclanders runs single and multi-day guided trips into the Berg, visiting rock-art sites, sleeping in tents, caves and mountain huts. He is a member of the South African Mountain Guide Association registered as a guide with the Department of Tourism, Registration Number KZN0050.

He can be contacted on telephone or **fax 033 239 5013, Cell 082 443 4287** or visit www.bergfree.co.za.

Peak High Mountaineering

Peak High Mountaineering is South Africa's leader in guided hiking and mountaineering. We conduct tours and courses in a variety of destinations in southern Africa, including the Drakensberg, Cape Town (Table Mountain), Cederberg, Magaliesberg and Free State.

Contact: Gavin Raubenheimer on gavin@peakhigh.co.za or

Tel: +27.333433168

Fax: +27.333433168

Mobile: +27.829905876

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.

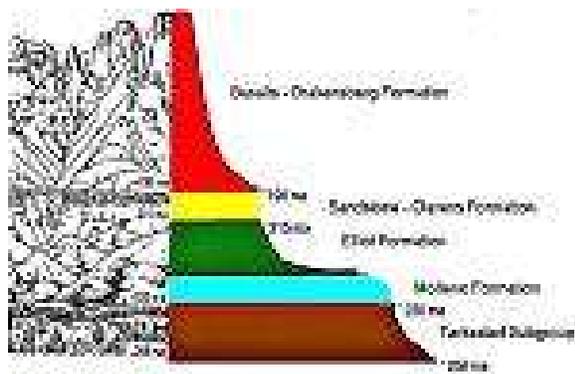
Through the next 250 million years, several more thick layers of sediment were deposited into the swampy depression. These sediments resulted in the formation of red, green and purple-coloured mudstones that contain rich fossil deposits of both carnivore and herbivore reptiles and of the vegetation they 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 riddled 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 amygdales, 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, amonites 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
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