



Fixtures List & Magazine: July-September 2017

CHAIRMAN'S CHATTER – Third Quarter 2017

Please see our fixtures list for the third quarter 2017 below: It is jam-packed full of hiking opportunities for all abilities.

The closing date for the **Annual MBC Photo Competition** is 31.07.2017. Please see the article in this mag about how to submit your photos. You must be a paid-up member of the MBC to enter. The slide-show presentation of the photo entries and the judging are scheduled for the Social on the 09.11.2017.

Please see the MBC website <http://www.mountainbackpackers.co.za/fixtures-introduction.html> for suggestions on warm gear for hiking in the Berg in Winter. Although cold, the views can be most spectacular this time of year. BE PREPARED for the cold and the fun!

Keep an eye on the MBC Facebook page for MBC news. If you're a paid-up member, you'll receive weekly or bi-monthly emails on fixtures updates and any new announcements. If you are NOT receiving these mails, kindly let us know on membership@mountainbackpackers.co.za.

Remember that the fixtures list can also be found on and downloaded from www.mountainbackpackers.co.za, along with a host of other interesting information about hiking, equipment and some articles about Club activities.

Please pay your subs for 2017 if you haven't already. Huge thanks to those who have!

There is advanced notice given in the Socials list for the **MBC AGM on 12 October 2017**. The AGM will be held at the Sherwood Bowling Club at 7pm. Boerie /Cheese rolls will be catered for attendees.

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
Recruitment	Roy Bowden	082 901 5301
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 to NEW members from September to November 2017)
(NEW members joining up in December will be at the 2018 rate, but will include December and all of 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 (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 – 3rd QUARTER

July 2017

Date	Description	Dist / Elevation	Leader	Contact	Grd
8-9 July	Zulu Cave. Meet at Monks Cowl wildlife office at 08:00. Route: Zulu Cave and back via Sphinx trail. Fitness required.	28km 950m	Farouk Omarjee	031-577 6336 081 530 8447 farouko@telkomsa.net	3
15-16 July	Cobham area. Back by popular request. eSipongwene via Policeman, Titty, Whaleback. Overnight in Nutcracker / Lakes cave. Easy valley walking to “cave” day one.	18km per day	Andy Brown	072 101 2498 andybza@gmail.com	3
16 July	Howick meander. - Local day hike - Symmonds Stream Conservancy, Beacon Hill Conservancy, along the Umgeni River to Howick 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. 12 July. R20 donation to the conservancies.	16km	Keith Ashton	033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	2
22 July	Kloof Gorge. Meet at Ezemvelo car park Kloof Falls Road at 08:00 Look for MBC banner.	9km	John McGovern	082 659 5111 Between 08:00 and 13:00	1
29 July	Meet 8.30 at our home in the Karkloof. No 24, District Road 709, Karkloof . We shall walk through the forest to Bushwillow Park, up the steep forest path then along the grasslands and come down by Rockwoods Lodge and the Karkloof canopy tours, where there will be a vehicle waiting to transport back to our home for refreshments. A lovely days walk in the country i.e ZERO CARS AND TAR. A lunch pack and light jacket is needed.	20km	Christine Pickup	082 782 6025 christinebro3@gmail.com	2

August 2017

Date	Description	Dist / Elevati on	Leader	Contact	Grd
5-6 Aug	Monks Cowl area. Magnificent Intunja, via Zulu Cave. Easy first day. Steep pull up and down Intunja on day two.	15km per day	Andy Brown	072 101 2498 andybza@gmail.com	4
5 Aug	African Fish River Trail. 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. Please confirm if joining walk by 4 August .	13km	Heidi Cox	heidi.dinan@gmail.com 0827064283	2
12-13 August	Highmoor - Backpacking hike to overnight in Caracal Cave - Via Fulton Rock with good Bushman's Paintings - Ideal for first time backpacking & sleeping in a cave, but also good for more experienced hikers as we will do some exploring from the cave so smaller day-pack also recommended - reasonable fitness required for steep descents & climbs - Bring enough water bottles to last overnight - Combined hike with other clubs. - MAXIMUM 10 MEMBERS, first come & paid first served - Last booking by Wed 2 Aug. Cost: R70	12-15 km per day	Keith Ashton	033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	3
19-20 August	Lower Injisuthi Cave: Meet at Injisuthi Wildlife office at 09:00 Ideal for first time backpackers unsure of their fitness.	16km 300m	Farouk Omarjee	031-577 6336 081 530 8447 farouko@telkomsa.net	3
19 Aug	Kloof Gorge. Waterfalls, Mpiti and porcupine. Meet at Ezemvelo car park Kloof Falls Road at 08:00 Look for MBC banner.	9km	John McGovern	082 659 5111 Between 08:00 and 13:00	2
25-27 August	MBC Mahai Winter Campout. Amphitheatre 25-27 August. Mahai Campsite is situated in the Royal Natal Maloti- Drakensberg National Park at the base of the Amphitheatre, 46km north of Bergville. Day hikes arranged by MBC. Cost R120 per person per night. No pensioner or child discount.	15km Sat & 8km Sun	MBC Committee	amygrantham@futurenet. co.za	3

September 2017

Date	Description	Dist / Elevation	Leader	Contact	Grd
16 Sept	Kloof Gorge Hike. TBA Meet Kloof Falls Road car park at 08:00 Look for the MBC banner.	? km	John McGovern	082 659 5111 Between 08:00 and 13:00	2
16 Sept	International Coastal Cleanup. A very important international event on the environmental calendar (3rd Saturday of Sept). Meet at 08h00, likely at Beachwood Mangroves, but TBA when confirmed with organisers.	5km	Heidi Cox	072 101 2498 andybza@gmail.com	2
17 Sept	Howick - Day hike in "The Ambers" - hike in extended area - Lovely views around Howick & surrounding areas, plenty of game & birdlife - Combined hike with other clubs. - MAXIMUM 12 MEMBERS, first come first served - Last booking by Wed 13 Sept. Cost : R20	12-15km	Keith Ashton	033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	2
22-23 Sept	Rockerries pass on day one to Mponjwane cave. Returning via Mnweni Pass on day two. Escarpment hike to up 3000m altitude. Not for the unfit or the faint hearted. We leave the cars at Mnweni Cultural and Hiking Centre.	13km day one 25km day two 1800m	Andy Brown	072 101 2498 andybza@gmail.com	5
30 Sept to 4 October	The Giants Cup Trail. Sani Pass to Bushman's Nek. 4 nights. 5 days.	60km 700m	Farouk Omarjee	031-577 6336 081 530 8447 farouko@telkomsa.net	3

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
30 Sept to 4 October	The Giants Cup Trail. Sani Pass to Bushman's Nek. 4 Nights. 5 days.	60km 700m	Farouk Omarjee	031-577 6336 081 530 8447 farouko@telkomsa.net	3
30 Dec 2 Jan	BUSHMAN'S NEK- CELEBRATE NEW YEAR IN STYLE IN A STUNNING AREA - Short (just over 1.4 km) backpacking to Bushman's Nek Hut for a three-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 - last bookings by 15 Dec. Cost: R360. i.e. R120 pppn	12-15km per day	Keith Ashton	033 239 5023 keimarg@iuncapped.co.za	3

DURBAN RAMBLERS HIKING CLUB
Saturday and Sunday Hiking Programme
JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2017

Sat 01 Jul 2017 – Summerveld Conservancy

Hike Leader: Linda 083 353 8319

The Summerveld Conservancy is in the predominantly equestrian area of Summerveld and has an endangered ecosystem, the irreplaceable grassland known as KZN Sandstone Plateau Sourveld. Meet at 13:30 at the closed Assagay Hotel/ Engen Garage (571 Kassier Rd) to drive through to Summerveld at 13:45 where we will walk through this beautiful area. Grade 1 Easy; ±7km

Sun 02 Jul 2017 – Kloof Gorge (KKNR Saurus Pools)

Hike Leader: Margie Forbes (073 437 6915)

Walk through Krantzklouf Gorge to Soras Pools (Splash Rock) and return along the river (Molweni). Steep in places (350m descent/ ascent) so fitness essential and a hiking pole highly recommended. Meet at 07:30am at the main picnic/ parking area (152 Kloof Falls Rd). Entrance fee R30. Grade 3-4; ±12km.

Sat 08 Jul 2017 – 85th Anniversary Celebrations of the Durban Ramblers Hiking Club

Organiser: Linda 083 353 8319/ linda@compasshr.co.za

Time 12:00; Venue Phezulu Safari Park, Old Main Rd (just past the Pot and Kettle), Botha's Hill. Cost: R80 members, R150 non-members. A buffet lunch will be served. Please advise Linda should your preference be vegetarian. Bar service for own cost. RSVP to Linda by 24 June 2017. Payments to be made by the 30 June 2017.

Sun 09 Jul 2017 – Illovo River Trail (Amanzimtoti)

Hike Leader: Anna Kapp (071 427 7139)

A new Sunday hike on fairly flat terrain next to the river. Some sugar cane. Possible drinks at the brewery after the hike. Meet 07:30am in road at Glenwood Village, 397 Che Guevara (Moore) Rd at or Illovo Business Park in time to start hiking at 08:15am (directions will be sent nearer the time). Petrol sharing R30. Grade 3; ±18km

Sat 15 Jul 2017 – Paradise Valley Nature Reserve (Pinetown)

Hike Leader: Linda 083 353 8319

Good beginner's hike, in mostly shaded wooded areas and with a few gentle hills. One of the two national monuments in Pinetown is to be found in Paradise Valley NR – the Umbilo Water Works (1887-1905). There are also mysterious burial mounds (stone) scattered around the reserve. Park in Oxford Rd and meet at 13:45 inside the reserve (10 Oxford Rd). R20 entrance fee; Grade 1 Easy to moderate; ±6km

Sun 16 Jul 2017 – Mitchell Park to Point (Durban)

Hike Leader: Jenny Rooks (084 952 0622)

Walk from Mitchell Park to the Point and back. Bring money for coffee etc. along the way. **Note distance!** Meet at 07:30am at Mitchell Park (Nimmo Rd parking area). Grade 3; ±20km

Sat 22 Jul 2017 – Mzinyathi Falls (Inanda)

Hike Leader: Philip 082 417 0204

Meet 13:15 at Durban Green Corridor's eNanda Adventure Park on Inanda Dam. Directions: take Inanda Rd towards Waterfall, turn left at the traffic lights into Ngwele Rd/ M259, drop all the way down into the valley until you reach a four way tar crossing and turn right into Wushwini Rd towards the dam wall, proceed over the bridge below the dam wall, onto the dirt road and on to the site centre 4km along the dirt road on the left. GPS: 29° 41.500'S 30° 53.353'E or -29.691667, 30.889217. This is a lovely walk with stunning views over the dam up to uMzinyathi Falls, which plunges 100m down a beautiful sandstone amphitheatre into the forested gorge. Members R30 Non-members R50; Grade 3 Strenuous; ±6km.

Sun 23 Jul 2017 – Everton Circuit (Kloof)

Hike Leader: Chris Dobson (082 461 1954)

Hike upstream from Krantzkloof Nature Reserve into the Everton Conservancy (oldest urban conservancy in SA) taking both seldom used and new routes to various waterfalls. The area is renowned for its outstanding natural beauty and rich biodiversity. Meet at 08:00am at the KKNR main picnic/ parking area (152 Kloof Falls Rd). Entrance fee R30. Grade 3; ±18km.

Sat 29 Jul 2017 – Beachwood Mangroves (new hike route)

Hike Leader: Tina 083 289 6276

Meet at 13:45 at the Durban North Pick 'n Pay Hyper (south parking), to leave at 14:00. Guided tour of the Beachwood Mangroves, a national monument with an important estuarine habitat on the Umgeni River mouth. There will also be a suburb walk to Virginia Circle and back. Donation R20pp towards the Nature Reserve. Grade 2 Moderate; ±12km.

Sun 30 Jul 2017 – Mzinyathi Falls (Inanda)

Hike Leader: Philip Collyer (082 417 0204)

Hike on hilly terrain from Inanda Dam to the falls and back. This is a Green Corridor initiative. Mzinyathi Falls has been inducted by the eThekweni Municipality as one of the tourists attraction sites as part of the rich history of Inanda. It's also the place of the Shembe, Qadi and Rastafarians. Meet at 08:00am at Union Main Centre (45 Old Main Rd), Pinetown. Entrance: R25 members, R50 non-members; Petrol sharing R25. Grade 3-4 ±10km.

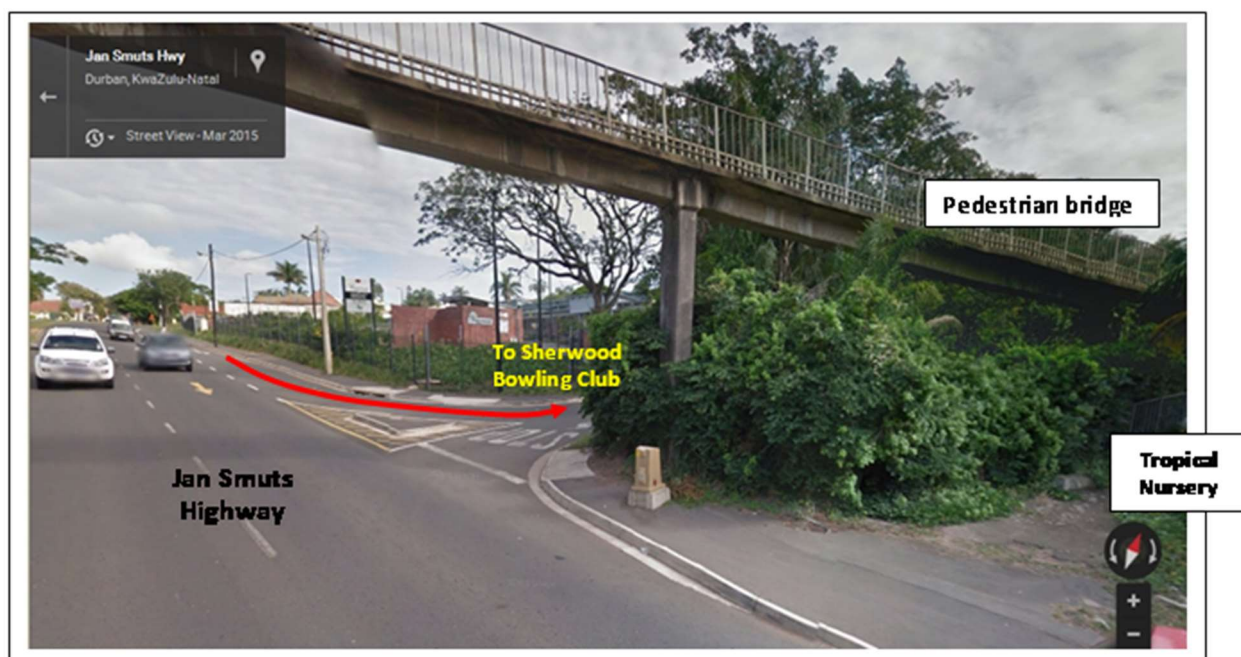
MBC SOCIAL CALENDAR – PLEASE NOTE THE VENUE

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.

We gather at 19:00 for a 19:30 start.

MBC Socials for 3rd quarter 2017

13 July	30 th Anniversary Braai. And a little slide show to take us on a trip down memory lane.	Please RSVP your attendance to Karen on kjmchiro@eject.co.za for catering purposes. RSVP's by no later than the 10.07.2017.	BYO meat/braai options, and your friends. Salads and rolls will be provided. Cash bar available. R20p for non-members please.
27 July	Digital Mapping of the Drakensberg Rock Art.	Michelle Dye from the African Conservation Trust. http://www.africaconservationtrust.co.za/	
10 August	More escarpment hikes from Andy Brown	Andy Brown	

24 August	4x4 camping trip to Northern Tanzania with a brand new safari company 'Great Migration Camps'. Their expertise and local knowledge made this a game-viewing trip of a lifetime. We visited the Ngororo Crater, Serengeti National Park where we witnessed the calving and migration of wildebeest; dropping down into the Great Rift valley to Lake Natron on our way back to Arusha.	Jovita da Silva and Christine Raulstone	
14 September	An August 3 day mountain bike race in the Namaqua National Park with the potential for magnificent flowers...	Sorin Dimitriu	
28 September	East Coast Falconry	Rowan Matting	
	FOURTH QUARTER SOCIALS		
12 October	AGM	Please RSVP your attendance for catering purposes by 07.10.2017. amygrantham@futurenet.co.za . Boerie/cheese rolls will be served to attendees.	
26 October	A mini first aid workshop. Being able to think clearly and think out the box during times of stress or emergency is a strong attribute for any leader. Doug does	Craig Smith and Doug Lang An "in the bush" emergency, basic first aid workshop, (not for certificate) but by a certified and very capable medic who's used to being away from civilisation.	

	first aid training aimed at remote areas with limited access to huge amounts of medical equipment and this fits in well with the hiking. He uses simulation and re-enactment as part of his course and it's invaluable for first aiders to get an idea of how bad a scene can look.		
09 November	MBC Annual Photo Competition 2017	Maggie and Wendy from the Bluff Camera Club	There are 3 prizes to be won. Please see details in the magazine.
23 November	MBC Annual End of Year Party	Join the MBC for an End of Year Celebration. Please rsvp to Amy on amygrantham@futurenet.co.za by 09.11.2017 for catering and seating purposes. Friends and non-members are welcome at a cost of R60pp for non-members. Cash bar available. All food will be supplied by the MBC and the Sherwood Bowling Club.	Charity to be announced.
14 December	To be announced		
28 December	NO SOCIAL		

HIKING TIPS

CONVERTING CORDED ZIPPERS TO A LOCKABLE ZIPPER: BY NEIL WILLIAMSON

When camping or attending a festival, I like to be able to put a small lock on my tent to prevent unwanted guests. Alternatively, when I travel I like to be able to lock my bags. However, nowadays a lot of hiking and camping tents and bags come with zippers with a cord pull tag which makes locking them futile as the cord can be easily cut or undone.

So here is a way you can modify them.

What you will need:

- Hacksaw
- Hammer/ crimping tool
- Crimps
- 1.5mm stainless steel cable
- File
- Scissors
- Craft knife
- Tubing

Step 1

Cut the existing cord from the zipper.



Step 2

Thread the steel cable through the zipper.



Step 3

Thread the crimp onto both the ends.



Step 4

Hammer the crimp in place (or use a crimping tool).



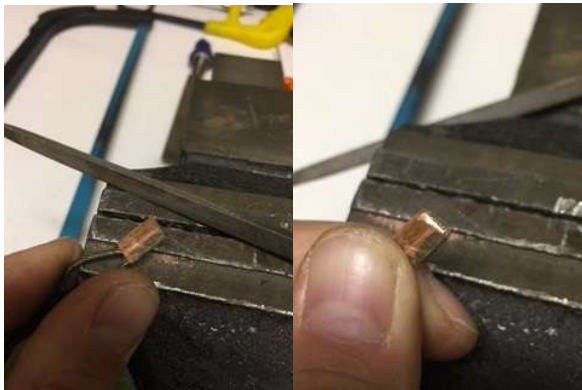
Step 5

Cut the excess cable. It is best to do this through the end of the crimp as it will allow a clean cut. Cable is notoriously difficult to cut.



Step 6

Used the file to smooth the end for the crimp. You don't want any sharp edges on the zipper.



At this stage the job is technically done. I prefer to complete the job by adding a plastic tube over the crimp.

Step 7



Step 8

Chill and hike knowing your tent is all locked up.



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.

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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 gavin@peakhigh.co.za

Tel: +27.333433168

Fax: +27.333433168

Mobile: +27.829905876

REPORTBACKS FROM RECENT HIKES

- **March: Central Berg Traverse.**
 - **April: Mlahlangubo and Nhlangeni Passes**
 - **May: Rockeries and Mnweni Passes**
 - **May: WonderValley Cave.**
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Central Berg Traverse.

Cathedral Peak Hotel and return via Xeni, Twins and Rolands Caves.
18-19-20-21 March. Distance 50km. Elevation 1500m

By: Andy Brown

Nine hikers departed the Didima / Cathedral Peak hikers parking lot on Saturday for our little four-day adventure on the escarpment. Once again there was quite a few leaders, with Farouk Omarjee, Greg Walker and myself, joining John and Christine Pickup on their hike. We were ably accompanied by Neil Kemp, Jean Coleman, Mohammed Motala and Mike McKenna.





Day 1. Xeni Cave. 8km.

The long weekend started with a short relaxing walk up the uMlambonja valley. With the exception of a little bolder hopping the day held no surprises for us, and we all reach the cavernous expanse of Xeni Cave in good spirits.



Day 2. Twins Cave. 12km.

The exit from Xeni Cave to the contour path is marked as dangerous, due to its steepness and a little bit of rock scrambling, but after a little huffing and puffing we were all soon up the hill and on the contour path. The recent rains had done wonders for the undergrowth, to say that the path is overgrown is a serious understatement. So, after over four hours of bundu bashing we found ourselves at the foot of Xeni Pass only two kilometres as the crow-flies away for the cave. In hind-sight it would have been easier to have boulder hopped up the river. The remainder of the walk to Twins Cave was uneventful although upon re-joining the stream near the top of the pass, it had disappeared so water was at a premium that night.





Day 3. Roland's Cave. 16km.

The last pull up to the top of Mlambonja Pass certainly clears out the cobwebs first thing in the morning, but the Kwakwas stream on top provided us with much appreciated refreshment. The views along the edge of the buttress were spectacular as we passed the tops of Xeni Pass, Cockade Pass and Tseketseka Pass. By the time we skirted past Organ Pipes we were all looking forward to a relaxing evening in Roland's Cave. For Acrophobia sufferers, the last few metres into Roland's has its challenges but that's a story for another day.



Day 4. Cathedral Peak Hotel. 14km.

The wind was howling and buffeting us a little as we exited Roland's cave, but settled down as we reach the top of Organ Pipes Pass. The mist cleared quickly to allow

magnificent views as descended the northern edge of the pass before passing through the wall to the Camel path. This section is also marked as dangerous on the map and due to erosion, there are certainly a couple of exposed sections that warrant the warning. From the Camel, onwards it was all downhill to the hotel for a cold beer to celebrate a stunning walk.



Thanks go to “Team Pickup” for organising and leading our adventure.

Cheers AndyB

Vergelegen Hike Report.

Mlahlangubo and Nhlangeni Passes

27 April – 1 May 2017

A small party of five set off from Vergelegen with the goal of hiking up Mlahlangubo Pass and down Nhlangeni Pass, sleeping in caves along the way. Participants were David Gay as leader, Tish Bryson, John Borrowdale, Jeannette Broeck and Thinus Bezuidenhout. The weather forecast predicted perfect cool weather for the duration.

By: Thinus Bezuidenhout



Day 1: Shelter Cave via The Hook

The first 4 km to the river crossing at Rooibessiebos were easy-going, with adjustments to packs involving bending, kicking, bandaging and Leatherman pliers. From there the path was overgrown and we did a little 'detour' before reaching The Hook. We stayed on the ridge up to the saddle above Runaway Cave,

then descended down the steep slope only to find the cave uninhabitable. A bundu-bash ensued to reach the river. We followed the path upstream for 500m and climbed up to Shelter Cave. Everybody was exhausted after negotiating the difficult terrain.

Day 2: Hlatimbe Cave (North) via Mlahlangubo Pass

From the side of Shelter Cave, we went straight up the grassy slope to the top of the ridge and followed the path to the top of Mlahlangubo Pass where we were met by the familiar sight of dagga smugglers. There is a natural spring just a short way down the Lesotho side. 1km further North we scrambled down the gully to have a look at Lynx Cave, before continuing to Hlatimbe Cave North. That evening was marked by the consumption of a modest amount of a home-blended cocktail of sorts.

Day 3: Nhlangeni Cave via Lamunram and Mohlesi

We doubled back and traversed around Mlahlangubo Peak, crossed the ridge at the saddle and had a quick tea-break at the stream below Lamunram. Then we traversed around Lamunram and followed the Boja-bo-tsotse River to the top of Mkomazi Pass, from where we climbed up Mohlesi mountain to reach the neck above Nhlangeni Pass. The multitude of false summits on Mohlesi makes for a personal Heartbreak Ridge experience. There is water towards the Lesotho side of Nhlangeni neck. Nhlangeni Cave can be found 500m down Nhlangeni Pass on the west side just beyond the two blowholes.



Day 4: Birds Nest Cave via Nhlangeni Pass

You have to find your own way down this pass. The top part is boulder-hopping until just before Bridge Cave from where you can walk on the east bank. The rocks are unstable and we did not escape without a few falls, scratches and even a face-plant (fortunately onto soft sand). After Small Cave you can cross over to the west bank and find the path going to Sulphur Springs. We arrived early at Birds Nest Cave for an afternoon of relaxing and swimming (read: speed-dipping in cold water).

Day 5: Return to Vergelegen via Mkhomazi River



We soldiered back to the bridge crossing for a wash in the river before returning to the Himeville Arms Hotel for B&B [sic] (beers and burgers). The trip was both physically demanding and a good opportunity to make new friends.

A big thank you to David Gay our leader intrepidus and the MBC for making it happen.

Thinus Bezuidenhout

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“PASSING” the weekend in the Berg

6-7 May

Rockerries and Mnweni Passes

By: Andy Brown

This weekend, when most sane people were at home watching the Rugby, four young Klipspringers and this old Mountain goat elected to ascend Rockeries pass and enjoy all the creature comforts of a night in Mponjwane cave. On Sunday we returned via Mnweni pass and valley.





After a six hour 11km haul up the valley and Rockeries pass we finally reached the escarpment plateau at circa 3000m altitude having ascended 1800m. Another 45

minutes 1.5km haul up towards Rockeries tower saw us safely ensconced in Mponjwane cave. A pleasant evening had by all and a mild 7°C at night.



An early start the next morning saw us take a short diversion to inspect Ledgers (Ledges) Cave, before heading to the top of Mnweni pass. 10 hours and 25km later after plenty of rock hopping we finally hit the road just short of our destination at the Mnweni Cultural & Hiking Centre.



We had beautiful weather and a good time was had by all, although I suspect there will be a few stiff legs the next morning.



Participants: Michaela Geytenbeek, Tarryn Holcomb, Hamzah Khan, Cameron Hofer & Andy Brown.

Cheers, AndyB

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Wonder Valley Cave

20-21 May



Seven of us from the Mountain Backpackers Club set off to spend a night in Wonder Valley Cave on the 20th May 2017.





The distance to the cave was eight kilometres and the maximum altitude/height gained was 470 m. Perfect Winter weather to hike in.



By Farouk Omarjee

HIKING TIPS

Hiking Technique and Etiquette

To become too technical about the ability to walk would be to spoil the simplicity of backpacking! However, here are some common-sense techniques and matters of etiquette that newcomers should take heed of:

Packing Your Backpack

- Use a kit list (see the Club website) to check off the items you need for your hike, especially if you are a newcomer or haven't hiked for some time.
- Develop a packing system for yourself and try to stick to it so that you always know where things are. If things can get lost in a handbag, you can imagine what can get lost in an 80 litre backpack!
- Your sleeping bag should go inside your backpack. Buy a proper stuff-sack to compress it to fit, if necessary, and seal it inside a large rubbish bag to keep it dry. Since it is the last item to be used each

day of a hike, it makes sense to pack your sleeping bag at the bottom of the upper, main compartment, although some people prefer to put it in the bottom compartment.

- Group your clothing into functional groups (e.g. sleepwear, warm-wear, next day's clothes, etc.) and seal them in plastic bags as well. Except for your rainwear and a jacket, the rest of your clothes can go in the bottom compartment (or the bottom of the upper, main compartment - whichever you prefer).
- Pack your food into the side pouches and the top of the main compartment. Your rainwear and jacket will also have to fit into the main compartment.
- Do not fill your water bottle at home - do this when you get to the starting point of the hike. Water bottles are prone to leak because of the decreasing air pressure outside as you drive to the higher altitude of the Drakensberg. •

Make sure you do any major adjustments to your backpack in advance of your hike. Most of the pack's weight should be carried on your hips. This involves changing the height between the hip-belt and shoulder straps so that the hipbelt sits on your hips and not over them. You will probably have to do this if you borrow or hire a backpack. It is difficult to make this adjustment on some internal frame packs, and you don't want to delay the group just as everyone is ready to start walking!

Before You Set Off

- Do your boots up properly, lacing them all the way up to the top of the neck as intended. This will help reduce the possibility of spraining an ankle and also prevent your toes from sliding into the toe-cap when going downhill. Tie your laces with a firm double bow, and cover them with gaiters (either the anklet or full-length type). Gaiters will prevent the lace loops on one boot from catching on the hooks of the other boot, or getting caught up in bushes. Gaiters also prevent stones and other debris from getting into your boots, may provide some protection from snake bite, and help to keep your boots dry for a little longer in wet weather.
- Before you start hiking in cold weather you may feel comfortable in your warm jacket, longs, balaclava and gloves. If you are going uphill, within a few minutes you will want to stop and remove most of this extra clothing, to the extreme annoyance of those with more sense! If you have any consideration you will just have to put up with the discomfort until the leader calls the first stop! Look to the more experienced hikers in your group for an example and heed their advice.
- Rain-wear can make you very hot and uncomfortable, especially in summer, regardless of how breathable the fabric is claimed to be. Avoid wearing it in mist, intermittent light drizzle and short, light showers, but always keep it handy at the top of your backpack.
- Keep a jacket in the top of your backpack so that when you make a longer rest stop in cold or windy weather you can keep yourself warm. Remove the jacket as soon as you are ready to start walking again.
- Unless you are hiking with walking poles, keep your hands free. Pack everything into your backpack and don't encumber yourself with hand luggage! Hand luggage quickly becomes uncomfortable, and if you are negotiating difficult terrain you may need your hands to steady yourself. Don't tuck your hands away somewhere (e.g. under shoulder straps or in pockets) so tightly that you cannot get them out in a hurry should you need to arrest a fall.

On the Move

- Pick your feet up, especially over uneven ground. This will reduce damage to your boots and the chances of stumbling or twisting an ankle.
- A major fall while wearing a backpack can be catastrophic! Stay focused and concentrate on your walking. Watch where you place your feet, always choosing the firmest, most solid-looking option. Beware of loose rocks, pebbles, wet clay and overhanging tufts of grass. If you cannot avoid these, try to use them only to steady yourself, and don't transfer all your weight to them. You should aim never to fall, since every time you do you could cause yourself a serious injury.
- Never step on wet black rock - it is almost always slippery, so you are virtually assured of an ignominious fall! The same can be said of wet clay.
- When a path is so overgrown with high bush and grass that you can hardly make it out, you should slow right down and feel your way along it with your feet.
- As much as possible, try to walk with a natural gait that is comfortable for you. The less rolling, teetering and tripping you do, the less energy you expend, and you will expose your ankles to far less strain.
- Modern backpack designs allow you to make frequent and easy adjustments using lock-buckles. If your shoulders are feeling sore, transfer more weight to your hips by tightening the hip-belt and slackening off the shoulder straps. Do the reverse if your hips are getting sore. You can do this on the move - there is no reason to stop! Frequent adjustments are almost as refreshing as a stop anyway.
- Unless you are using walking poles it is usually better to swing your arms freely at your sides. However, you will need to lift them to clear porcupine grass, brambles and rocks. Where there are a lot of these obstacles you can tuck your thumbs under your shoulder straps to support your arms with the minimum of effort.
- Take lots of small, low steps rather than large, high ones when going uphill. Zigzag your way up a steep hill; this flattens the climb and also reduces soil erosion.
- You are much more likely to slip or lose your footing during a steep descent than a steep climb, so take special care going downhill. Increase the gap between you and the person immediately in front of you. Don't brake yourself on gravel, clay, sand or dry grass - make use of bedrock, large boulders, roots and grass tufts instead. Crab side-ways on grassy slopes - braking is easier and you will be able to arrest yourself better if you do slip. Zigzagging downhill will flatten the descent, reduce soil erosion and save a lot of wear and tear on your knees. A really steep descent can be almost as exhausting as a steep climb. It certainly requires a lot more concentration and you will still work up a sweat!
- Conserve your energy by conserving your height. You expend precious effort gaining height, so don't gain it or lose it unnecessarily. If you have a choice, a slow, steady gain in height is a better option than a short, steep climb. You should even try to conserve your height for each step that you take. Over rough ground, try to step on firm boulders and ledges that will allow you to level your path as much as possible instead of bobbing up and down.

- Once a group is underway, try not to disrupt the pace of the other hikers. If you maintain a steady pace you will feel more relaxed and you will not irritate those behind you with a stop-start type of progress. You can also use your momentum to help carry you over some obstacles or up short little rises.
- If you are feeling tired, don't just stop! Besides the potential for causing a multi-hiker pile-up, you may lose the rest of your group if the leader is unaware that you have suddenly dropped out! You will also never develop the fortitude needed for more difficult hikes. Rather decrease your pace and push yourself onwards at a reduced speed. When the leader sees the gap between you and the person in front of you gradually increasing, he / she will know that it is time for a stop.
- Don't tail-gate / slip-stream the person in front of you, especially going downhill. If you slip, you will probably also knock their feet out from under them. Besides making them really mad, you could hurt yourself badly if they land on top of you. Even on level ground there are several good reasons to leave at least a 2-metre gap between yourself and the person in front of you:
 - o If the person in front of you has an erratic pace, the gap will allow you to enjoy a steadier pace yourself. The more erratic their pace, the bigger you should make the gap between you.
 - o If the person in front of you stops suddenly, you will have time for a more gradual stop yourself. It takes a considerable amount of effort to bring yourself to a sudden stop from 4 km/h or more with a backpack, and a sudden stop may even cause you to skid and lose your footing if your braking surface is poor.
 - o You can avoid whip-lash from branches and other vegetation that are swung aside by the person in front of you.
 - o You will have more time to plan your own footing and avoid making the same mistakes as the person in front of you.
 - o You will have better warning of snakes, brambles, projecting or loose rocks, overhead branches, clay surfaces and other potentially hazardous things ahead. This will give you more time to get your footing right, duck or twist yourself around obstructions - or select a better route.
- When boulder-hopping across or along a river, take care when transitioning from sand or gravel back to the boulders. Sand and gravel stick quite well to wet boot-soles, making for treacherous conditions when you step onto another hard, smooth surface like that of a river boulder. Rather wriggle the soles of your boots in some water to wash off the dirt before stepping onto more boulders, or if there is no water immediately available, tap your boots gently against some rock to knock the excess dirt off.
- When wading across a fast-flowing river you should wear either your boots or a pair of good, strapped sandals (e.g. Rockies). You can easily lose your footing and get very wet if you stand on a sharp or slippery rock with bare feet, and if you stub your toes the rest of your hike will be miserable!
- When climbing up a small ledge, make sure you can see where you are putting your hands so you don't get bitten by a berg adder or worse! When climbing down a ledge, always face into the climb (as you would on a ladder) because this allows you to make better use of your hands and feet. Never face outwards because you cannot anchor yourself properly and your backpack may get caught on the rock behind you, launching you into the void!

Taking a Break

- There are different types of rest stops, and you should follow the more experienced hikers' examples about how best to make use of the opportunity when the leader calls for a stop:

- o The standing stop - this is often used to allow other hikers to catch up or negotiate an obstacle, or to observe the scenery, draw attention to some fauna or flora, etc. This presents an ideal opportunity to catch your breath and drink some water. Make sure you can reach your water bottle yourself without having to remove your backpack or having to ask someone to pass it to you. If you can find a high enough ledge or boulder to rest your backpack on and thus take some weight off your shoulders while still standing on your feet, all the better! The standing stop usually lasts only a minute or two.

- o The sitting stop - this may be used when a large group has become quite spread-out, or a particularly strenuous section has just been completed. It allows the slower members to catch up and relax a bit themselves, although the folk at the back will always have shorter rest stops than those in front! If you select a suitable boulder or sloping patch of grass, you can sit quite comfortably while the boulder or slope takes the weight of your pack off your shoulders. There is usually no need to remove your backpack; in fact, it can make a very comfortable backrest. In any case, removing your backpack and then putting it on again can take a considerable amount of effort, although the boulder or slope may allow you to do this from a sitting position provided your backpack doesn't get away from you! Before you sit down on grass, stamp around the area a bit, looking carefully to make sure there are no snakes hiding there! The sitting stop is usually for 5 to 10 minutes or so, but during this time the leader or one of the other fitter members of the group may scout ahead for the best route.

- o The refreshment stop - here you "dismount" (remove your backpack) and have a snack, eat your lunch, take a swim or have a catnap. You will even be able to explore a bit without being encumbered by your pack. This type of stop is usually for at least 15 minutes.

- Always make sure that at least one other person in the group knows where you are at any given time, should you need to answer a call of nature, collect some water, etc. This is especially true during refreshment stops. It is all too easy - particularly with a large group - for someone to be left behind by accident!

- When you remove your backpack for a rest, always lie it on a clean rock or grassy area with the hip-belt and padding uppermost. If you place your pack the other way up in dirt, you will transfer this to your clothing when you put it back on. In rain, it is better to have a wet hip-belt and padding than muddy ones!

- Never sit on your backpack! Besides potentially crushing food and equipment like billies, stoves, sunglasses and torches, you can bend the frame and make your pack very uncomfortable. You will also place the stitching under unnecessary strain, and perhaps puncture the shell with sharp stones, twigs, thorns or thatch grass.

- One of the reasons people take up backpacking is to get away from the overcrowding of modern society, so don't crowd the other hikers in your group by tail-gating them (see above), sitting on top of them, putting your stuff on top of theirs, etc. Spread out, make use of the space around you, and let the others do the same!

Your Overnight Stop

- Once at your overnight destination, take the trouble to choose your campsite or sleeping area carefully (if you have a choice). In a cave, use a groundsheet to mark off your area and try to keep its top surface clean to protect your expensive hiking equipment (e.g. sleeping bag, backpack, warm clothing, etc.) from the dirt. There is absolutely no need to grovel in the dust and mud! Take care to respect the "clean areas" of other group members as well, especially by not walking on their groundsheets, mattresses and bedding or spilling food or drinks on these.
- After claiming your sleeping area, one of the first things you should do is collect water. Especially if the water is out of sight of the cave, you will not know where the other members of the group have washed themselves, so you should rather fetch water before any bathing takes place! Even if the water is right nearby, it is far more convenient to have it on tap next to your cooking area. One of the best items for this is a 5 litre wine bag (which actually holds 8 litres out of the box). The tap can be removed completely from its socket, but this requires some effort the first time and should be done at home by lying the bag on a smooth floor, tap up, straddling the tap with your feet and then pulling on it really hard!
- The next thing to do is get cleaned up so you can enjoy the rest of the day in comfort. In summer you might be brave enough to wallow in a stream or stand under a waterfall. Never use soap since this damages the environment and it also takes too long to wash off in cold water. Washing should take place below the point where everyone collects water. The leader may allocate these areas, especially when there are inexperienced hikers in the group.
- In winter or in poor weather you can enjoy a hot flannel bath. Heat some water in a large billy and pour it onto a face cloth. Don't dip the cloth in the billy because then you cannot use the remaining water for drinking and cooking. Wipe yourself clean as best you can, wringing out the cloth and pouring more warm water onto it as you go. This is better than going to bed sticky and uncomfortable.
- You can make a pillow by using your sleeping bag stuff sack and filling it with some spare clothing items such as your jacket and your clothes for the next day. If your pillow is right, you are less likely to snore and so less likely to annoy the light sleepers in your group!
- During the night, keep your boots and backpack near you but in a difficult-to reach position for thieves. If in doubt about security, pack most of your equipment away in your backpack and arrange a night watch.
- Even if you retire in perfectly calm weather, always assume that a wind will come up during the night since this is often the case. Place rocks on items of clothing you leave out to dry, and never leave rubbish lying around because this will end up all over the countryside.
- Keep a full water bottle within easy reach because if you wake up during the night you will probably be thirsty after a hard day's work, and you will not want to have to clamber around looking for it. You should also keep your headlamp / torch within easy reach.
- Be careful when venturing out at night to answer a call of nature! Preferably let someone else know where you are going, even if it means waking them up. If it is misty or snowing, without any lights in

your cave or tent to use as a bearing, it is frighteningly easy to become disorientated and get yourself into trouble. In bad weather this could spell disaster! In extreme weather a walking rope can be laid along the ground between the camping and toilet areas to act as a guide so you don't get lost.

- When breaking camp after an overnight stay in a cave, allow yourself at least 1 hour for the task. Unless you have developed an efficient routine you will probably need closer to 1,5 hours. Get dressed, pack your backpack, and prepare and eat your meal and hot drinks all at the same time, otherwise you will waste a considerable amount of time. Allow at least 1,5 hours to break camp when tenting. Novice hikers may need up to 2 hours for this task! Remember - you don't need to hurry, you just need to have a good routine and manage your time well. Certainly there is no time to day-dream or sit and stare into empty space!

Cleaning Up

- Do not use bath or dish soap in the streams and rivers, even if it is biodegradable. You should wash your dishes thoroughly with dish soap to avoid getting stomach bugs - especially on long hikes - but make sure that none of this lands back in the stream. Similarly, brush your teeth and rinse away from the stream, using your mug.
- If you have any cooked left-overs from supper or breakfast that cannot be carried out, bury them. It looks very unsightly to throw this outside the cave or hut, even if you think you may be feeding the local fauna. Also avoid putting scraps of food into the stream when you wash your dishes. Clean up your spills and messes before you leave. Work on the principle that another group of hikers may be using the cave or hut immediately after you, which is very likely with popular ones in high season. Just like you, they would not want to be confronted with someone else's mess on their arrival.
- Matchsticks, cigarette butts and candle wax all constitute rubbish and must be treated as such, so take this waste back home with you. It is unlikely that there will be any smokers in a backpacking party, but it is amazing how many smokers don't consider their cigarette butts to be litter. Similarly, many hikers don't consider matchsticks to be litter either. You should rather use a gas lighter than matches anyway.
- Reserve a strong plastic bag or empty plastic container (with lid) for your rubbish, and keep it handy at your overnight stop. Use it as you would an ordinary rubbish bin. Do not leave rubbish lying around in the open with the idea that you will clean up later, because even a gentle breeze can spread it all over the countryside. Cans and empty gas cylinders can be crushed between two large rocks to reduce the amount of space they take up in your rubbish.
- Do not bury your rubbish - take it home with you. It is preferable not to discard your rubbish in the bins back at the KZN Wildlife office on your return, because unlike urban areas which have specialist waste contractors, KZN Wildlife must deal with the rubbish themselves and you don't want to add to this burden unnecessarily.
- Urinate far from the cave or campsite, in the open where the rain will eventually wash away any traces, and not on any paths or stream beds. Women folk who are obliged to use toilet paper for this purpose must use a trowel to bury the paper properly, not just place a rock on top of it with the paper sticking out from underneath.

- Defecate far from the cave or campsite as well, in the open and also not on any paths or stream beds. This task is best done during daylight hours! Use a trowel to dig an appropriately-sized hole, or use the heel of your boot if the ground is soft enough. Ensure that all your used toilet paper ends up in the hole as well and doesn't blow away. Then cover the hole with the soil you dug you, press the area down firmly with your boot, and if there are any convenient, loose rocks lying around, place one or more of these on top of the spot where you squatted. When you have finished, there should be no obvious evidence that you have been there.

After Your Hike

- You should start the remainder of your clean-up as soon as you get back home. Put your boots, bedding and tent out to air and dry. Discard your rubbish and empty your backpack of used clothes so that it doesn't start to smell. The rest you can do at a more convenient time!
 - Boots should be dried slowly in the shade, not in the direct sun or near a heat source. Once dry, they should be scrubbed clean with a soft brush and then polished or treated with a purpose-designed product such as Nikwax. Leather boots become hard and crack easily after repeated exposure to water unless they are treated frequently in this way.
 - Regular hikers generally start re-packing their backpacks as soon as their equipment is clean and dry again. With the exception of your sleeping bag (this should be left unpacked so that it can loft properly) and clothing, most equipment can go straight back into your backpack, thus simplifying packing for your next hike.
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