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Mountain Club of South Africa KwaZulu-Natal Section

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NEWSLETTER

July/Aug/Sept 2012

Club News

- Welcome to new member Jonathan Kirkman, who recently joined the Club. Mike Carter has resigned.
- We were saddened to hear of the passing away on the first of May, of John Hone, a much liked and respected member of the Mountain Club. John was well known for his amazing talent as a photographer, and his beautiful pictorial books on the Drakensberg. On behalf of the Club, sincere sympathies are extended to John's family, friends and colleagues.
- Congratulations to Hannelie Morris and Joshua Pickering on 'tying the knot' recently – may you always happily belay each other!!
- **July Camp** is just over two weeks away – all good wishes go to Rikki and her team of assistants, and hopes for good weather and a very successful camp at Cobham, in the Southern Berg.
- **2012 Membership Subs:** Reminder statements are being sent out to members who have not yet paid their 2012 subs. **PLEASE PAY your subs** – or risk being struck off at the end of the year!
To those who have paid, thank you – also thanks to members who have made donations to the Club; they are much appreciated!
- Donations to the Club of unwanted or unused hiking/climbing/camping equipment would be most welcome – please contact Iona Stewart in this regard: Email: iona@sai.co.za or Cell: 082 990 3968
- The MCSA Annual Dinner this year, will be hosted by the Johannesburg Section in October; details to be announced.

Anne Rodwell

Mountain Development Trust Assessments (MDT) by Gavin Raubenheimer

The MDT conducted an instructor assessment in April this year. The results from Mountain Club KZN Section members were that Colin McCoy was given the Mountaineering Instructor Award and Paul Roth and Nic Shaw were given Mountain Walking Instructor Awards. Other people from outside KZN who passed the assessments were Neil Margetts (Rock and Mountain Walking Instructor) and Brett Nicholson (Rock Instructor).

These awards enable the instructors to teach and assess MDT levels on a professional basis.

Congratulations are extended to all!

The Great Winter Thrash-Wit Umfolozi *by Bruce Tomalin*

We went, we climbed many climbs, talked the talk, braaied the vleis (and some vegetables!), gazed at the stars and climbed some more climbs 'til broken in body but rejuvenated in spirit, we returned to our humdrum existences.....

A thousand thank-you's:

To Gavin Peckham, who keeps the venue available through his silver tongue.

To him too, for spending a large amount of his income on stainless steel.

To Anthony van Tonder, for organising the trip,

And for putting up some recent fantastic routes at do-able grades (although a little bit more stainless steel in a few places was requested, but turned down...)

And to the rest of the crew who made it a memorable week end.

Whytes Cave **9-10 June 2012** *by Felicity Kromhout*

This hike was led by Margaret Brown, who was disappointed that the only other Mountain Club member interested in going on the meet, was me! We were joined by members of the Ramblers Club: Noreen, Jean, Sushi and Eric.

We left Pietermaritzburg at 6am on Saturday and by 9:30am were on the path to Whytes Cave. Lunch was eaten, with wonderful hot tea, in Painters Cave. Margaret was concerned about the bad weather (rain and snow) she had noticed in the distance and encouraged us to keep moving.

It was very cold; Margaret read the temperature at 6pm and found it to be 2°C. As a result we were all in our sleeping bags very early in the evening. Jean and Sushi battled to sleep because they were so cold. The temperature when we awoke was 0°C.

Soon after starting our return journey in the morning, we had to stop and add layers of clothing as snow had started to fall, fortunately it did not last long. However we walked in very windy conditions with the temperature varying between 4 and 5°C. This prompted Jean to say "never again!!"....

Careful driving ensured that we were back in Pietermaritzburg before dark, after a great weekend.

Mount Everest (Harrismith) Meet *by Trevor Johnson*

A meet to Everest was organized for the weekend of 25-27 June 2012 by Trevor Johnson. Roland & Jackie Suhr and Brian & Colleen Snelling drove up around midday; they had secured an awesome camping area which was perfect for the number of people who attended. Trevor & Sue-Ellen Johnson drove up later in the day and arrived on Friday evening. The evenings were a bit nippy as were the mornings; during the day it was beautiful and sunny with blue skies.

Trevor and Sue-Ellen set off on the Saturday morning to go and climb "Two Fingers in a Pocket" (21); three pitches of great climbing. Trevor on-sited the crux pitch with Sue-Ellen following with a bit of assistance. James Voortman and Ian Bailey arrived during the morning. They set out and climbed "Rhino on the City Hall steps", taking it easy to the top. Trevor met them on the way down.

Roland, Jackie, Colleen and Brian did a day walk from the Camp site and were spotted by the climbers above. They had a wonderful day out, with Colleen and Jackie returning to the Camp site before lunch. Roland and Brian were more adventurous and decided to walk to the summit of Mooihoek Mountain, returning to the Campsite later that day.

Gerald Camp arrived with a bus load of school kids, who were part of the school's rock climbing club. On Saturday afternoon Gerald and one of the better climbers amongst the kids set off and climbed "Blue Sky" (19). They did very well and returned just after sunset.

Trevor returned to camp just after lunch and prepared a Lamb "Potjie". It was well prepared and just after dark, when the temperature started to drop, it was ready. It was a tasty dish and enjoyed by all. A very good way to end off a day of climbing!

Sunday saw Trevor, James and Ian back on Mooihoek where they had decided to climb "Magic Carpet Ride" (14 Trad). Sue-Ellen decided to be car guard and relaxed on the roof-rack of a car, enjoying the sunshine. The trio of climbers had read the RD and they were "sure" of their intended route. Not long after starting, Trevor down climbed and all three re-read the RD. They shuffled across to try another approach. Soon afterwards, Trevor down climbed for the second time. Again all three read the RD. They then all three moved across to try a new approach. On the fourth time they finally set off on the correct line. Trevor took the lead and got to the top of the first pitch, the first pitch was run out with not the best of gear placing selections on the route. Finally James and Ian arrived at the stance. All three of them decided to retreat and go and climb it another day when they are all more fit.

PS.....Everest has a new owner and he is doing a great job at renovating the place. Ablutions at the campsite have hot water showers and are clean. Please support him! He is always open to new ideas on improving the place.

When nine became ten

by Iona Stewart

As people contacted me asking to join the hike for 12/13 May 2012, I wrote down their names and by Friday had counted 12. Sadly three had to drop out at the last minute which, according to the arithmetic I learnt at school (in the dark ages), left me with nine people to go to the Berg.

I had booked Vast Cave in the Bushman's Nek region. We were all due to meet at my house at 06:00 on the Saturday morning. Bugs and his friend Mark spent Friday night at my home and we discussed the transport arrangements for the next day. Mark has a Landrover Discovery and he offered to transport seven, without packs. Easy! We would go in his Landrover and a Bantam bakkie could take all the packs as well as the remaining two hikers.

Once everyone had organized their packs and we were ready to leave, George (Zaloumis) climbed in with Dave (Pullen) into Dave's bakkie, and off they went. The rest of us climbed into Mark's Landrover - two in front, two in the very back and three in the middle. But there were four of us. Where did the extra person come from? Well, it wasn't a problem: we made like we were sardines in a can, and thus fitted in the middle seat. Amazingly we were not too uncomfortable. Whether we were nine or ten continued to be a puzzle for the rest of the trip. I kept counting nine of us, but there were ten!!

I had feared that going to Vast Cave might be a little tame for some of the hikers; after all, it is only about six kms from the cars, and it is not a five star cave either. We set off, leaving the Ezemvelo office at 09:20. Half way through the morning, we left the path to go down to the river for the obligatory brew. We lay about in the sun and chewed the fat, always a pleasant occupation when on a hike.

Leaving that spot we somehow ran out of path. No problem; we crossed the river then veld-bashed up the steep grassy banks, and up, and up and up some more, clutching at *Festuca* to keep our balance when it was very steep. We finally came out onto a ridge, veld-bashed some more until we came to the valley at the end of which was Vast Cave. At least it was a bit more strenuous than if we had been on a path the whole way.

We ate our lunch in the cave and then went for a stroll, up and up and up on to the ridge behind the cave. Wandering around on top we looked into the next valley and saw very fascinating rock chunks, enormous chunks. They looked as though they had been severed from the side of the mountain, but their tops were absolutely flat. They stood like many tables, way down the valley. Thus the decision was made that, on the way home the following day; we would go via these rocky chunks, or tables.

Back at the cave, we played around at 'moving furniture' until we had a nice place to cook and eat. We moved huge flat rocks from the ledge above down to the sandy alley-way, and made a dining area for sitting about in the evening. Periodically I counted heads, and once again sometimes got nine, sometimes ten. I think senility is setting in. Should I be leading hikes when I can't even count?

The night was long, but not uncomfortable. The stars could be seen, it was relatively warm, no real wind to hassle us, and gentle variations of snoring could be heard coming from the cave. At one stage, I thought I heard the sounds of baboons but it turned out that it was actually Bugs and Mark sneezing (sorry guys!).



Sunday morning dawned bright and we left the cave just after eight. In my enthusiasm to reach the sun, I took us on a path lower than where we meant to go to get over the ridge into the next valley, which caused a little consternation in the ranks!! Not that I was really worried. All we had to do, and we did, was climb, climb and climb some more, up the

steep grassy banks, rather like what we had done the day before. We came out on top, checked our route down and were soon at the chunky tables. They were flat on top and covered in vegetation. It did not look possible for antelope to get up there to graze. We guessed the tops could be burnt, if fires were ignited with "inyonies". (Burning grass balls carried by the wind). It would have been handy to have a geologist with us to explain what we were looking at.

We progressed by more veld-bashing as we worked our way down to the river where we had a very early lunch, and a swim. Actually, it was only Margaret (Brown), Jan (Phelan) and I who had the urge to plunge into freezing water, and it was worth it.

From there we hurried back to the cars as Bugs was very anxious to get back to Durban to attend a concert. I felt that the hike had been reasonably strenuous as we did more kms veld-bashing than actually following a path.

It was very pleasant to fill in the new Mountain Rescue forms. The Ezemvelo official on duty, Zandile, was very pleasant and keen to learn where Vast Cave is – she, like her predecessors, had not heard of it. This raises a distressing point. Previous hikers had used one end of the cave as a toilet, leaving little heaps and toilet paper in evidence. If the officials had not heard of Vast Cave, the previous occupants could not have booked in, or paid, or filled in the register. To crown it all, they fouled up the cave. On telling Zandile about our “find”, she expressed the desire to ride out there on horseback and find the locality of Vast Cave – I offered to take her!!

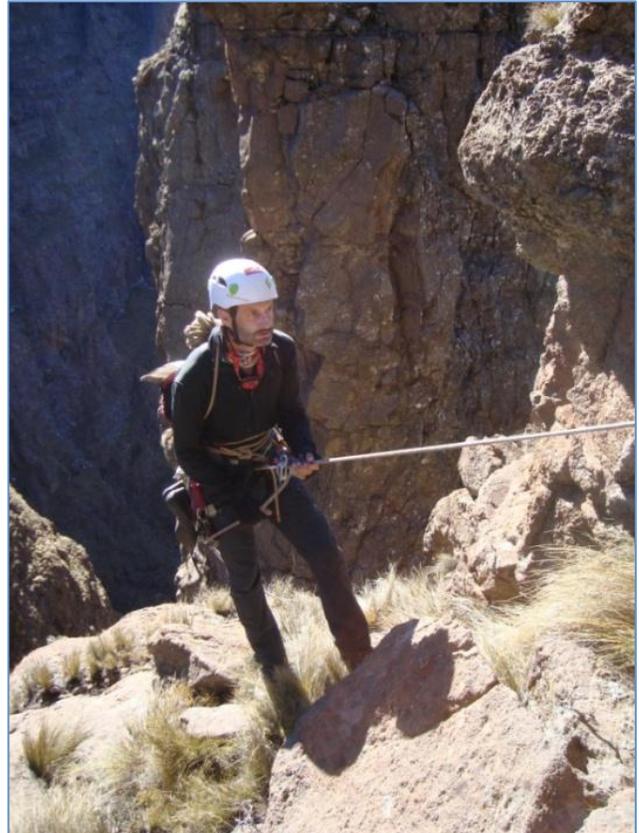
Besides those already mentioned, sharing this happy weekend with us were Felicity Kromhout, Jane Dickinson and Pamela McNamara, and I am NOT going to try and count how many names I have mentioned, it could be nine, or it could be ten.

Third Time Lucky - Climbing the North Ifidi Pinnacle

by Gavin Raubenheimer

Over the past 5 years I have made my way out to the Ifidi Cave with the idea of climbing the North Pin on no less than two occasions, only to wake up to heavy rain, and a long walk home. Both of these were guiding trips. I was then nagged by Sonja Thomas from Gauteng, to take her climbing in the Berg, as she wanted to gain experience on bigger mountains. Another attempt on the Pin was my obvious choice. So, with backpacks loaded with gear and food for 3 days, including a third rope for the fixed rope/abseil point, we set off in perfect autumn weather.

All went well and the weather was actually warmish for the middle of May. The Ifidi Cave proved once again to be a great place to stay and the following morning we headed for the belay area for the fixed rope. This is a 50m abseil to the col between the escarpment and the Pinnacle and is a very "airy" place. This done, Sonja started up the first pitch on the sharp-end. Her first ever Berg lead, while I belayed and hoped all was going to be okay. The first pitch is a not so well protected F2 pitch of just 10 meters. Once up this, I followed and she again led the next section, a 40 meter F1 traverse, which is not really hard, but the rock is not very good.



This was followed by a 50 meter C "walk" to the end of the traverse ledge. I took the lead on the final pitch which goes at F3. This was much harder by technical grade than the other pitches, but by far the best pitch, on good rock and very good protection.

On the summit we found an old plastic pill bottle acting as a summit box, placed there by Gavin Peckham and Richard Knot in the mid-90s. The Pinnacle was last climbed in 2004.

One 50m abseil off a good solid block got us back to the col and then a long jummar out back to the escarpment. After this we hiked back to the Mont-aux-Sources hut for the night. In the morning we descended via Beacon Buttress and then did a quick ascent of the four pitch F2 grade NW Chimney Route on Beacon Buttress. A grand 3 day trip!



Report on the Grand Traverse 21 April–1May

by Mavis Morris

Ten of us set off from the Bushman's Nek Border post on 21 April to traverse the Drakensberg from South to North, ending at Sentinel Car Park. We planned to complete the journey in 12 days. The total distance that we covered was approximately 230km. The team leader was John Pickup from the Mountain Backpackers Club, as also most of the other team members. We had sent a re-supply of food up to Sani Top Chalet which we were to collect on day 3. We had also arranged to be re-supplied by a party of Mountain Backpackers members at the top of Tseketseke pass on day 8.

Day 1: Sat 21 April - Bushmans Neck to Mzimude Cave area

We hiked up Thamathu Pass as well as Isicatula Pass to the top of the escarpment. We camped near the top of Mzimude Pass

Day 2: Sun 22 April - Mzimude to Sandleni Cave area

We woke at 5am (the pattern for the rest of the traverse) and boiled water for tea/breakfast. Packed up gear and tents and left by 6.45am. It was good to get an early start so that we could arrive at our destination for the day while it was still light and have time to wash before the cold set in. It was freezing in the mornings and we generally had to scrape ice off our tents. Spatula and rubber gloves work well!

Day 3: Mon 23 April - Sandleni to Senhlohlong

Woke up this morning to a winter wonderland! It had been snowing since about 3am so our tents were covered in a thick layer of snow. It snowed on and off the whole morning, hard walking in the snow as it shifts underfoot. I was so glad to have my walking poles for stability and to test the ground in places. We were heading for Sani Top Chalet to collect our supply of food for the next 5 days. Crossing over the saddle between the Hodgson's Peaks we catch a glimpse of Sani, and everyone is cheered at the thought of warm lunch in the pub. We have lunch, repack our rucksacks, now heavy with the next 5 days of food and head out again into the misty afternoon, knowing we will be camping in the snow again tonight. As we head up to the last ridge before the Thabana Ntlenyana ridge it begins to snow again. It is late afternoon and we are all tired. The gentle snow turns into a blizzard and we are all working hard, focusing on getting up the ridge and coping with the wind and snow blowing all around us. We drop down into the Senhlohlong valley and set up camp for the night. Weary and cold, we pile into our tents and into our down sleeping bags to warm up! After eating hot food, we slept well after an exhausting 29 km walk in very difficult conditions.

Day 4: Tues 24 April - Senhlohlong to Hlathimba

As we pack up this morning one of our team members decides to turn back and he heads down to Sani again. Today we are going to summit Thabana Ntlenyana, (3480m) the highest peak south of Kilimanjaro. It was still cloudy but as we neared there was a huge break in the cloud and we had the most glorious view of the summit. We dumped our packs and headed up in beautiful sunlight. It was spectacular to see the snow-capped peaks all around and enjoy the absolute beauty of the wild berg. It was also extremely cold and icy at that altitude! Group photos taken and time to head off again. We move on down the mountain and into sunshine, peeling off layers of clothes as we go. We camped in the Hlatimba Valley.

Day 5: Wed 25 April - Hlathimba to Langalilabele

Off early and some strenuous ridges today. The ridges from south to north are much steeper than going from north to south. Each day there are at least 3 ridges to climb. I think we climbed 29 ridges in total! We ascend Durnford ridge, go through Durnford's Gap and drop into the Jarding valley and camp near the river at the back of Langalibalele Pass. Today we are halfway, about 110km covered.

Day 6: Thurs 26 April - Langalilabele to Leslies Pass area

Last night the jackals were calling all around us - their sound is quite chilling! Today we summit Popple Peak and also Mafadi, the highest peak in South Africa. It is a rough, barren and inhospitable landscape. We find a Basotho horseman right at the top!

Day 7: Fri 27 April - Leslie's Pass area to Yodellers Cascades

Very strong winds today and we walk into it all day. We have a wonderful view spot overlooking the Ship's Prow - the gully looks daunting. One of our team members had their outer tent blown off the rucksack and they did not notice until it came to pitching camp in the Yodellers Cascades Valley in the evening. No chance of trying to recover it but hopefully we will borrow a tent from the re-supply team. From now on all our tents were packed inside the rucksacks...

Day 8: Sat 28 April - Yodellers to Tseketsseke

Exciting prospect today of meeting up with our resupply team! We have wonderful views today - can see the Cathedral Range, Mnweni and also the Eastern Buttress in the distance. It was very emotional meeting up with the 18 folks who brought up our provisions and good cheer - it was heartwarming to feel so encouraged and supported. We took group photos, ate fresh apples, and loved having some company.

Day 9: Sun 29 April - Tseketsseke to Mnweni

The resupply team goes down Cockade pass and we go over the Elephant Ridge. We have more fantastic views today - backwards looking at the Cathkin Peak range and ahead of us we can see all the way to the Sentinel. We pass in the valley behind Twins Cave and Mponjwane Pass and then up and over looking at great views of the Rokeries and Mponjwane. We look down on vultures circling their nest spots below the edge of the escarpment and eventually descend into the Senqu valley, the source of the Orange River and find a suitable camp spot.

Day 10: Mon 30 April - Mnweni to Icidi

We realize that we are so close to the end and that we will complete our journey in 10 ½ days rather than the 12 as originally planned. Everyone is excited. We pass the top of Fangs Pass, look at the Donkey, and visit Rat Hole Cave and later Madonna and her Worshipers. We find a good campsite in the valley below the Icidi Crown and for the last time do the routine of washing in the cold stream and setting up camp before the sun disappears.

Day 11: Tues 01 May - Icidi to Sentinel Car Park

Our last day! Looking at the Tugela Falls from the edge of the escarpment was a wonderful sight - except there was no water falling. The whole berg was much drier than we expected. Down the chain ladder and a quick walk to the car park where we managed to get a lift on the back of a bakkie to the Witsieshoek resort. Group photos, big smiles, hot showers and delicious food finished the wonderful journey off in a special way. It was an unforgettable and at times an epic adventure, a true endurance test, and a great spiritual journey of faith for me.

Congratulations on an awesome adventure and thank you so much for sharing it with us, Mavis. There are very few of us who would even contemplate such an arduous journey!

Rescue News

by Gavin Raubenheimer

On Sunday the 17th of June 2012, the Rescue Convenor received a cell phone call from a club member / rescue team member who reported that he was very ill and was at the bottom of Giant's Castle Pass. He had been ill for 2 nights and a day at that stage. A simple air rescue took place using the SAPS Airwing aircraft and the patient was taken to Mediclinic in Pietermaritzburg. He was found to be suffering from bronchial pneumonia.

Since April two cliff rescue training sessions have been held and one session with SAAF 87 Helicopter Flying School at Dragon's Peak.

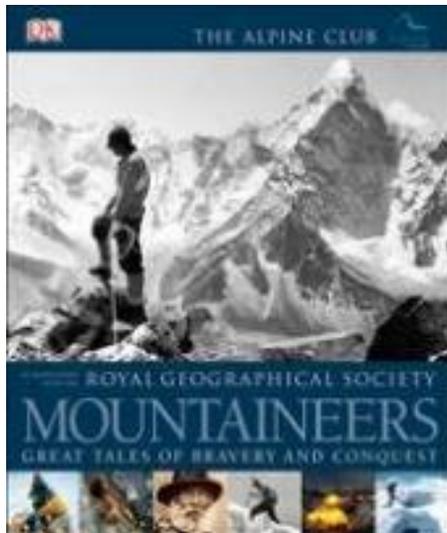
‘Mountains are not just physical entities - they have represented a wide spectrum of ideas, needs, and fears for various peoples at different times in history. In several cultures, they were regarded with awe as the places where the gods resided’.

(Unknown)

‘Historically, mountains have often been seen as dangerous places, notorious for bandits and evil spirits. Yet humans have been thriving at altitude for millennia, solving the same problems of survival that tax modern climbers - and reaping the rewards’.

(Unknown)

BOOK Recommendation:



Mountaineers (Exclusive Books & CNA)

Author(s): Royal Geographical Society, Alpine Club

Published By: Penguin Books Ltd, UK

Date Published: 3 October 2011

(Hardback) 360 pages

Price: Around R350.00

This is an epic guide to the most intrepid mountaineers in history. Written in association with the Royal Geographical Society and The Alpine Club, "Mountaineers" tells the story of the pioneers who first conquered the giddy heights of our planet. Full of great tales of endurance and perseverance, more than 100 of the top mountaineers are profiled, from Hannibal to Hillary. It helps you share in their triumphs and tragedies from the comfort of your living room as journal extracts and never-before-seen photographs and maps from the unpublished archives of the RGS and The Alpine Club help recreate history's greatest ascents. "Mountaineers" introduces you to a host of intriguing characters, from the Brits who insisted on hauling cases of vintage champagne up to Everest base camp in 1924, to the Italian Duke of the Abruzzi who took 10 iron bedsteads up Alaska's Malaspina glacier. Along the way you'll also find out about the important scientific discoveries that have shaped the course of human history and enjoy accounts of great bravery, fellowship and good humour in the face of adversity, all making "Mountaineers" a fascinating read for anyone with a spirit of adventure.

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Drakensberg – 5 day weather forecast	082 231 1602			
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