

Mountain Club of South Africa KwaZulu-Natal Section

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NEWSLETTER

Jan/Feb/Mar 2012



A Christmas message from the President

"We had another great year in the KZN section! We have had new members join the club, had a great meet sheet stacked with hikes, climbs, rescue practices, slideshows and a terrific Mountain Day weekend. I would like to thank everyone who helped make this year a success and who helped to keep the club going. It is the individuals who volunteer their time that makes us what we are!! Whether you're leading meets, serving on the committee, posting journals, are on the rescue team, going to meetings with your MCSA hat on, attending work meets, letting us know about current issues which might concern the MCSA or in any way doing your bit – well done, and thank you for your effort... I would like to wish you all a lovely Christmas, and may 2012 be a year you will remember!"
Hannelie Morris

Club News

- Welcome to the following members who have recently joined the Club: Warren Eva, Kerry Kee, Joshua Pickering, Christopher Hemert, Jared Peacock and Alexander Hesketh. May you enjoy a long and pleasant association with the Club!
- On the 30 October, the Mountain Club lost one of its 'legends' when Jeanne Watkins (wife of the late Des Watkins) passed away. Jeanne was an accomplished mountaineer in her own right, and was with Des on several first ascents of peaks in the Berg. Our sincere sympathies are extended to her family and friends.
- **The 2012 subs Statements will be sent out in early January**, together with the 2012 membership stickers. Members who have not paid their 2011 subs, will be struck off at the end of December – you have had a year to pay them!! We don't want to lose you.....

The new subs for 2012 are as follows:

OM (Ordinary Member)	R310	(inc from R290)
OJ (Ordinary Joint member)	R240	(inc from R220)
CM (Country Member)	R200	(inc from R190)
CJ (Country Joint member)	R160	(inc from R150)
Junior (previously Associate)	R140	(inc from R130)
Family Member	R 20	(unchanged)
Joining Fee	R 50	(unchanged)
Student Member (new category)	R140	(no Journal)

- The 2010 MCSA Journals have arrived, and can be collected from Anne Rodwell (phone 031 7672038) or Cesar de Carvalho at 'Bush & Bundu' at 175 Pietermaritz St. in Pietermaritzburg. Journals can also be collected from Audrey van Coller (phone 031 7028013) towards the end of January (and at the February Slide Show in Durban), after which they will be sent out by post.

- It is at this junction, I would like to express my thanks to all those who have contributed to the Newsletter during the past year – your input has been greatly appreciated! Thanks are also due to our advertiser, namely 'Bush & Bundu' who continues to support our Section.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank all those MCSA members who have given me so much help and assistance in the past year! *Anne*

Climbing News:

Beginners Climbing meet @ Swinburne
(19 – 20 November 2011)

by Hannelie Morris

SMS's on Saturday morning ranged between "It's raining quite hard" to "the sun might be coming out" – but in the end, all who went were very glad they did! Between the rain, the mist, the sun and the wind – we all had an awesome time, we really did!

I think the epic of the year award should go to Murray Saunders and Christian Pera. They arrived at 8:30 on Friday evening and climbed to the grass ledge (above the 4th pitch) on Long Bolt to Freedom, in the dark. They planned to bivvy on the ledge and complete the final pitches as the sun came up in the morning. Although it is a sport route, I can tell you that it is not the easiest route to find in bright daylight, never mind by torchlight. But that is not the end of the story.....

At 2 in the morning, as the weather man predicted, it started pouring with rain! So, the two of them bravely retreated and arrived back at the barn completely soaked and with wet sleeping bags, in time for breakfast. They went back to summit on Sunday, in the howling wind – after the epics the two of them have been through this year, I was very relieved to see them back on the ground! But well done, guys!

A lot of learning happened Saturday morning, with beginners learning to lead and thread chains and also getting the hang of rock versus indoor wall climbing, on some of the harder top-ropes on the Pyramid Boulder! Thanks to all the helpers – we could not have done it without you! Some of us escaped to climb Long Bolt to Freedom in the afternoon. Trying for a record time, Josh and I got to the top in 1h 45 minutes, but reading the summit book, that is not all that great a time... (At least it was faster than the speed record in the Nose).

Waiting on top for our friends to arrive (and bring the other 50m rope to abseil with) we could enjoy the 360 degree view – absolutely stunning! Saturday evening we had nearly 20 people and had a lekker kuier en braai! It is so cool how amazingly great mountain people are! Sunday morning we got going reasonably early and by lunch time most people's arms could not climb anymore...

Mountain Day Weekend

by Iona Stewart

Once again, Hannelie and her cohorts came up with a grand idea/excuse to celebrate our mountains – or rather, to have a celebration *in* our mountains, December 10th being the International Day of the Mountains. The MCSA was to honour the occasion with a gathering at Cobham, where various activities were arranged, albeit a week early. My task



was to “take a family hike”. I had advertised a hike of about ten km - I figured I could always raise or lower the degree of demand required, according to the people in the party.

Twelve of us left Cobham just after 10h00, and we headed for Boundary Rock. The weather was cool – superb hiking weather. The cloud was low and rain had been forecast for the whole weekend. Such weather forecasts are not always a deterrent to mountaineers! Our goal was to hike up to Whale-back and then loop back towards 'Sbongweni. When I saw that our “family” of hikers were really pretty strong, we agreed we would go for the Tittie as well.

At Boundary Rock, sitting overlooking that bench mark pool, we had some refreshment – lunch for some, snacks for others, but no-one actually got in and swam. I guess the falling temperature had something to do with that! The grasses were beautiful; so many in flower, particularly the *Bothria chloe* that gave the veld a purple look. It was also pleasing to see the dead



brambles that we had sprayed more than a year previous to this. The higher we went, the lower became the cloud and the mist. Fortunately those in the front arrived at the Whale-back in time to see the Tittie in the distance, but by the time the tail-enders got there it was out of sight. And this was an ominous sign; the cloud had got so low it



was about to leak. As leader I had the unpleasant decision to make – “we turn back folks, it is going to rain and anyway we are going to see nothing from now on up. Of course, even though we retraced our steps, the view was different, so it did not matter. It did drizzle a bit, and then it stopped!! Too bad, we ventured homewards. Not far from the camp, those of us at the back

encountered Hannelie and her group – all three of them, but the one was disguised under an umbrella, with the odd notion that no-one would see him. That was none other than Steve Cooke! Having met with the intrepid three who had done a 24km hike (we had done a 14km hike), we then detoured along the Ouhoud Trail, only to meet with a more realistic family group – Margaret Brown and her grandchildren, playing in the river.

We had hardly arrived in camp when it started to rain. No matter, our tents were pitched, tea was on the brew and nothing could have dampened the *joie de vivre* among the mountaineers, all of whom had done something of interest that day to celebrate International Mountain Day.

That night ended with a mega-braai – many of us reminiscing about climbing days gone by, instances where people had not met for as many as 20 years. It was a very cheerful evening, not at all dampened by the gently falling rain.

Quotes:

"The best climber in the world is the one who is having the most fun!" Alex Lowe

"I climb as hard as anyone on earth - I just do it on easier grades." "Mad Dog"

CARACUL CAVE, not a grade 2 hike!

by Iona Stewart

On the 17th September, a typically misty and bleak morning here at home, we left my place at 07h20 and were at Highmoor less than two hours later. Here we met Cheryl and Gerhard Venter. In the party were George and Liz Zaloumis – it is always good to have George with us as he is so knowledgeable about the fauna and flora in the berg and its management. Also with us were Felicity Kromhout, and two young visitors, Martin Hoffland and Warren Molds. Following the path past the dams and the Aasvoelkrans turnoff, it was an easy stroll to the cave. Being open grassland, we could see ‘forever’, including a couple of vaalribbok.

After an early lunch in the cave where we left our packs with Liz and Cheryl, the rest of us set off on a four hour walk along the nSongo river, led

by George. It is a lovely valley, with many flowers emerging for the spring, patches of natural bush on the opposite bank and pretty rock outcrops where we were walking. There was a nippy breeze which made the hiking quite pleasant. All the same, the two visitors in the group braved the steep climb down to the water and the freezing temperatures for a quick swim!

We came to a point where we could see the Aasvoelkranz, and the start of the farmland below, including Cape Griffins circling above the Aasvoelkranz Cave area, but started to wend our way back due to time constraints. On the way back to the cave we filled our water bottles in a wetland that drained into the nSongo. At the cave itself there were a few drips under which we had placed pots but as a precaution took bottles to fill as well – we need not have worried - the drips in the cave were surprisingly productive!

While Felicity and our two young visitors hived off to explore the ruins of an old stone house nearby, we returned to the cave for refreshments and a bit of Flintstone furnishing in the cave. Many years ago a terrible fire raged through the cave destroying the beautiful trees and shrubs growing on its edge. However, we could see the opposite mountain range and the steep descent to the river below. Judging by the calls, there was a greater variety of birds in the sparse regrowth than I am used to hearing from other caves.

Sitting around the stone-age table that evening, we were entertained by amazing stories of life on Marion Island. Gerhard, as a meteorologist, had spent a year there and his stories were really fascinating.

On Sunday morning, leaving the cave at 08h00, we worked our way down the valley towards the nCibidwana river onto the lower path, and except for the nasty brambles and ubiquitous wattles initially, we followed a very comfortable path to Fulton's Rock. There we had a snack stop and inspection of the paintings on the Rock.

George was Warden at Highmoor and thus had tramped all over these hills burning firebreaks, so we diverted from the path in the Machuwini area and climbed up the nearby 'hill', as it was a more direct route back to the cars. On our left as we climbed, was a lovely forest and we could hear the stream below that was running through it. It was a very steep climb, requiring much puff and effort, and two hands as well, in places. Part way up, George found a berg adder for everyone to examine and ooh and aah over and have a discussion about it!

Lo and behold, we eventually hit the path that we had been on the day before and it was an easy walk home from there. We had planned to have lunch and a swim at one of the dams – the first had fishermen on it so we went on to the second, little hut-shelter and all. We were just taking off boots etc. anticipating a swim, when the fishermen appeared and started fishing in 'our' dam. Damn!

We were back at the cars before 15h00 which was surprising, considering the really very strenuous hike we had just done, and seemed like 'all smiles' all round, which was not the case during the ascent! It was particularly pleasing to have two young visitors with us, Warren and Warwick, especially when Warren offered to carry my pack for me. It had been a most enjoyable and satisfying two days for all of us, exploring a little-known area of the southern Berg.

"This faded letter makes somewhat sobering reading but then 71 years have passed"
.....Stephan Spleen

G. 8

A/C.  No. 403.

BASUTOLAND GOVERNMENT.

Assistant District Commissioner's Office,
Mokhotlong, Basutoland.

20th September, 1940.

G.M.J. Sweeney Esq.,
Natal Mountain Club,
223 South Ridge Road,
Durban.

Sir,

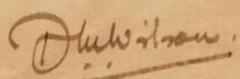
I beg to inform you that I have been instructed to make arrangements for the closure of all mountain passes between Sani Pass (at the head of the Umkomazana stream) in the South, and Namahali (Mout aux Sources) in the North, by fencing or blasting, in order to prevent trespass, poaching, stock theft etc. by Basutoland natives in Natal.

My greatest difficulty is the transport and distribution of the necessary fencing material etc. along this difficult border country, and it was when investigating the possibility of effecting delivery with Bergville or Winterton as railhead and using the Senqu Passes as the main route that Mr. P.H. Van der Riet of the Cathedral Peak Hotel very kindly allowed me to see a copy of the sketch map of the Drakensberg from the Mnweni to the Bushman's River, compiled by you.

This map would be of very great assistance to me in this work and I should be very much obliged if you would inform me (a) whether my Administration could obtain a copy or copies, and the cost; and (b) whether you have also compiled similar maps of the stretches between (i) Mnweni and Mout aux Sources in the North, and (ii) Giant's Castle and Sani Pass (Nkomanzie) in the South, and if so whether copies of these are also available and their respective cost.

Thanking you for your assistance in this matter.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,


Assistant District Commissioner.

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