

# Mountain Club of South Africa KwaZulu-Natal Section

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## NEWSLETTER

April/May/June 2011

### Club News

Welcome to the following new members who have joined the Club: Ingrid Swart, Mike Jooste and Paul Snook, the latter being a returning member.

Christine Koenig has applied to re-join the Club.

John Crumley has transferred to the Hottentots Holland Section; Byron Post and Sue-Ellen Penny have resigned.

It is with deep regret that we learn of the passing away of a much-loved member, Rodney Owen. In the words of Gavin Peckham:

**Rodney Owen (aka 'Piglet')** has just passed away after a long and valiant struggle with brain cancer. Rodney was a very active, "larger than life" chap who was a pillar of the Club for many years, serving on the Committee, leading meets, opening new routes and generally rabble rousing. Over the years Rodney was a keen cross country runner, trout fisherman, rock climber, MT biker and general all-round "good-guy". He will be sorely missed by his very wide circle of friends and by his loving wife, Barbara, and sons, Benjamin and William. Go well my friend - you made a big difference in the lives of all you met. Sincere condolences are extended to Barbara, her family and friends, by all members of the Club - you are very much in our thoughts.

**The Club AGM** that was held on Saturday 12 March was attended by 30 members. As the starting time for the meeting had been made earlier (by accident!), members had a chance to socialise beforehand and catch up with news and so on. The Committee remains the same as last year, with the exception of the Access Portfolio, which James Voortman is taking over.

Congratulations to Lorna Peirson and Jim and Maureen Thomson to whom Life memberships have been awarded, in recognition of achievements in mountaineering, and loyal service to the Club.

Eric Penman has news that his former wife Maureen (now Maureen Richards) who lives in the Lake District in the UK, has been awarded the MBE (Member of the British Empire) by the Queen, for her services to Mountain Rescue, having taken part in over 3000 rescues - this is an amazing achievement!

### PLEASE NOTE:

- A request from Roger Nattrass with regard to climbers going to Shongweni crags: to reduce (or not take) any valuables with them, owing to there being several incidences of mugging and theft in the area.
- The Committee asks that members do not make any more donations of MCSA Journals to the club, owing to lack of space in the Club Library. Exceptions are made for Journals which are pre-1960, which can be used to replace old or damaged copies in the library.
- **WANTED TO BUY:** A North Face Westwind Tent (2 - man); contact John Borrowdale: Tel: (039) 727 3833

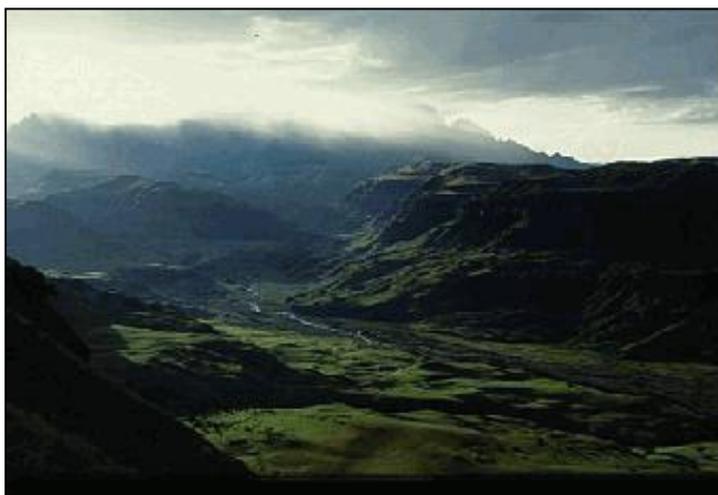
### WHITE UMFOLOZI

An Umfolozi climbing meet has been planned for the long weekend of **16 to 19 June**. Please contact Ian Bailey ([ian.bailey@umgeni.co.za](mailto:ian.bailey@umgeni.co.za) or [ianbailey@telkomsa.net](mailto:ianbailey@telkomsa.net)) if you plan to attend.

The landowner, Mr Gerhard Greef, is probably the most "climber friendly" landowner it has ever been our privilege to encounter. He has gone to considerable lengths to make this magical venue accessible and safe for climbers. Please support him by attending this climbing meet and/or by organising trips of your own. Apart from a plethora of trad lines, the Umfolozi now has more than twice as many bolted routes as any other venue in KZN – and what is more, the vast majority of the routes are in the moderate grades (12 to 22) that make this venue by far the most climber friendly venue for casual and "week-end" climbers. This is an ideal "family" venue with lovely sandy beaches, safe swimming, fishing, bird watching and climbing. You can hardly imagine a better place to "chill out" and escape from the pressures of daily life. Contact Ian B if you are keen to join us.

### 91<sup>st</sup> JULY CAMP 2011 at INJISUTHI

This year, after an absence of 31 years, once again July Camp will be held in the Injisuthi area (in the Central Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Park. This area is described as being cradled between the Injisuthi (Little Tugela) and Cowl Fork rivers at the head of the Injisuthi valley;



surrounded by magnificent scenery and dominated by Cathkin Peak, Monk's Cowl and Champagne Castle.

The Injisuthi area offers a dramatic and scenically rugged terrain with superb hiking in the Little Berg; backpacking on the Escarpment from Giants Castle to Champagne Castle and beyond, with a range of mountain

passes in between; rock-climbing opportunities; and, if weather conditions are suitable, even opportunities for ice climbing. It has some superb examples of rock art (e.g. Battle Cave to which there are conducted tours), abundant bird life and the antelope for which the Berg is renowned.

This will be a Base Camp with a difference! The ruggedness of the terrain has precluded the development of any road beyond the small hutted Camp, so Base Camp will be in the minimally developed Injisuthi Camp site. It is very simple, just with mown areas, ablution facilities, running water and sufficient longer grass and trees for a pleasing degree of privacy. The Camp will run from **Saturday 2 July to Saturday 16 July 2011** and Campers can attend for the whole period, either week, or for just a few days. **Space will be limited, so please book early.**

## Hiking News

### **Weekend Meet at Mooihoek 12 – 13 February 2011**

*by Suzi Raymond*

Enticed by El Presidente's glowing descriptions of her family farm at Mooihoek in the Lunenburg district, 18 members, ranging from new (Daniel) to old gathered at the historic homestead on the weekend of 12-13 February. The fullness of summer was palpable, especially after the copious rains. The energetic MTB (multi terrain bikers) rode the many exciting routes on their metal steeds whilst real steeds looked on in amazement, and rotund cattle placidly grazed in the fields. Josh, Hannelie, Derrick and Steve enjoyed the freedom a bike brings. Hannelie and her handsome kitchen help presided over the pots and we wanted for nothing. Unbridled swimming (Daniel, the delight of the meet, au naturel) was the order of the day.

On Saturday, Steve and Gordon set forth on an epic circuit of many kilometers. Hannelie in her wisdom, advised Suzi to do a solo climb of the big 5 on the horizon, in preparation for her Annapurna hike. The first one was difficult-ish (no paths), but once up there, she could revel in all the wonderful plants in flower; proteas, gladioli, plectranthus, watsonias etc, etc. Abseiling by hanging onto grass stems with her teeth and many potential sprained ankles being narrowly averted, she finally made it back without getting lost. Gavin P. tried his hand at fishing in the fast flowing river, whilst the more laid back lounged in their chairs and admired the magnificent view. A glorious weekend in champagne weather.....



## Climbing News

### THREE FACES OF THE PYRAMID

*by Roy Turner*

After enjoying the festive camaraderie of the Sentinel Centenary outing, I was buoyed by enthusiasm for more Drakensberg rock climbing. The scheduled "beginners trad climb" of the Pyramid to be led by Graham Smith looked a good opportunity to ride this wave of enthusiasm and I contacted him promptly. The only other interested parties to contact him were Chris and Kelly Sommer from Rustenberg who happened to be the same young couple with whom I had enjoyed the McLeod variation up the Sentinel a few months earlier.

Unfortunately Graham had to cancel the trip due to a back injury. Somewhat disappointed, we decided to go ahead with the trip anyway, so armed with photos, a sketch of the route and plenty of sound advice from Graham, the three of us met at Cathedral Peak on 27 December 2010, ready to walk off our Christmas carbo load.....

Having studied the map and realizing that the second day would involve approx. 900m of climbing from the Tseketseke hut to the summit and 1400m of descent back to the hotel, we added a note to the foot of our entry in the mountain register that we might be extending our trip a further day.

We hiked in hot subdued sunshine up from the hotel past the Doreen and Ribbon Falls to the contour path below the Camel, down into the Tseketseke valley then up the valley through fairly dense growth and found the MCSA hut before dusk. During the approach hike we enjoyed



Chris and Kelly at the pitch, 'Column' behind.

*Photo: Roy Turner*

the **alluring first face of the Pyramid** standing tall in the sunlight next to the Column and beckoning us on.

Our first job on reaching the hut was to block up the window openings just in time to keep out the strong wind-driven storm which hit soon afterwards. After an early awakening, we were off and following the cairns up the Tseketske valley before 05h30. We identified the break out point from the valley correctly but the long climb up the steep grassy mountainside needed a lot of grass-assist pull-ups and proved strenuous, so that we were pleased to take five on reaching the neck next to the Shark's Tooth (a name given by Graham to a prominent spur) which had been our first target.

The next few kilometers contouring around the lower rock band skirt of the Pyramid was a good deal easier. We parked our poles and proceeded to climb through the rock bands and pull through the grass bands until we reached the foot of the single pitch climb up to the summit. At this stage the mist was beginning to swirl and the storm clouds had formed ominously in the distance.

After sorting out our ropes and gear, Chris, who is by far the best climber, set off to lead the pitch. From the bottom it looked easy and after Chris finally reached the top of the pitch and my turn came to climb. I fully understood why he had found it quite a tricky climb and I was grateful for the top belay. By the time that I joined Chris it was after 3pm and the clouds and mist were far from friendly. We were now on the **exhilaratingly high second face of the Pyramid** and well behind schedule.

Without much Berg rock experience, I found the exposure at this point awesome but also a little scary with several hundred-metre vertical drops on both sides of the narrow ridge to the summit, an abseil descent to come, the striking phalanx of the Column which seemed like only a stone's throw away and the vultures wheeling below. Graham had told us that he set a handrail for less experienced climbers on this section and I knew then that I still fell into this category. I was also well aware that the impending weather, swirling mist and shortage of daylight hours meant that there was no time to set up further belay points and ropes, so I opted to save the summit bid for another time and rejoin Kelly who had also recognized the shortage of time and stayed at the base of the pitch.

Chris decided to "have a look at the last section" and went on to clamber around the side of the blocks, as Graham had called them and then climb the final 25m or so to the summit before rejoining us. We were all delighted that he had accomplished the object of the mission. Then we hastily scrambled and abseiled back down through the rock bands to locate our poles in the col.

By this time we were aware that we would be pushed for light, which we needed to locate the correct point on the distant ridge which would take us onto the head of the long, steep grassy slope back down into the Tseketske valley far below. Fortune favoured us here and we had virtually reached this point when the storm broke with such ferocity that, after losing my beloved 20 year old tatty hiking hat to its first blast, we battled to stay on our feet and had to hang on to the grass to make it over the ridge. Here we were met by the full onslaught of the storm which

made the descent of the long steep slope down into the valley dangerous, with the chance of a broken leg or serious fall.

Thankfully, we spotted a slight overhang to which we crawled and huddled together in the partial shelter from the cutting wind, crashing thunder, jagged lightning and icy rain of the ferocious storm now raging around us. Thank goodness for our gortex jackets - without which my chattering teeth might have become an ominous rattle. We were then experiencing the **ferocious third face of the Pyramid**.

This storm may have graciously delayed its arrival but it also persistently delayed its departure and we shivered for probably two hours before it abated slightly, so that we ventured wet and frigid from our scant shelter to proceed with the descent, for me mostly in the form of a bum-slide, by the light of our head-torches down the wet slope.

Back down in the Tseketseke valley we finally felt safer and with hawk-eye Chris in the lead peering through the dark to follow the cairns, we stumbled back down the trail with the mirage of the hut seeming a long time turning to reality. We finally pushed open the door and collapsed exhausted, shortly before midnight and 18 hours after leaving that morning.

Next morning, after a fairly leisurely start, we hiked back to the hotel, enriched by the fond memories of another eventful adventure in the Drakensberg and looking forward to the next opportunity to check the faces of the Pyramid and, with the benefits of our experiences, to add my own and Kelly's name to that of Chris's in the summit book.

**Quote:**

"He that mounts the precipices wonders how he came thither, and doubts how he shall return....."

His walk is an adventure and his departure an escape. He has a kind of turbulent pleasure, between fright and admiration."

*Dr. Samuel Johnson*

### **A new Hiking Trail**

The Num-Num 2-5 day Trail is situated just three hours from Johannesburg, in the Mpumalanga Highlands between Machadodorp and Badplaas. The Num-num five-day trail is named after the 'Forest Num-num' tree, *Carissa bispinosa*, easily identifiable by its forked thorns that remind one of a walking stick. The trail opened in 2010 when the three estates, Wathaba, Five Assegais Country Estate and Bermanzi collaborated to create the first 5-day trail on private land in South Africa.

Situated on the lip of the mighty southern African Escarpment, where the continent falls to the Indian Ocean, the Num-num explores some of the most dramatic landscapes in the world. The Num-num Trail takes you through this ancient land where the San hunted through secret valleys with waterfalls and crystal pools to the summit of the Skurwerand with views over the Komati valley all the way to the peaks of the Swazi Kingdom.

This entirely new trail has been designed and built to the highest standards by Albert Bossert, and has been graded by HOSA, the Hiking Organization of Southern Africa as a Green Flag Accredited trail.

See: <http://www.thenum-numtrail.co.za>

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