

MCSA Amajuba Section: Trip Report

Easter weekend 2009: Bell / Cockade Traverse

DAY 1 - Thursday afternoon we left the hiker's parking area to Sherman's cave. The weather was pleasant for an afternoons hike. We saw some splendid views of Cathedral peak, the Bell, Inner and Outer Horns. Nearing the cave we saw Cathkin Peak and Gatberg in the distance. Happy hikers, looking forward to the next 4 days in the mountains....

We saw a lot of hikers going up to the little Berg; they camped next to a stream just above us. The evening was lovely; we sat out on a rock, had sundowners and enjoyed each other's company. Later after supper we turned in, listening to the night sounds.... Snoring....



Christine, Johan, Andre, Marion,
Anny, Zelda, Ria on day 1

Day 2 - Woke up to an awesome sunrise, morning was crispy. The weather looked good and after breakfast we started the task of packing up. We left the cave in high spirits and heavy packs. We then came up to the place where the others camped, wow what an awesome view. From there the real uphill started, man and what an uphill. We took it easy and stopped a few times for photos and lots of breaths!!! Half way up me and Anny decided that we will speed it up and get to Orange Peel and wait there for the others. After a while the mist started to come in all around us. Marion, André and Zelda arrived awhile later.

The mist got thicker and at times there was light rain falling.

Christine, Johan and Ria came and we had a bite to eat. We still had about 3 kms to go to the overnight spot under Cathedral peak. We carried on in the mist and eventually arrived at a spot just under the Gendarme next to Cathedral Peak. Because I'm familiar with the area I took my Gps and traversed across and down to the flat spot where the camp site is. It's a nice place with awesome views. The helicopter from the hotel can be hired and you can sip champagne and see the sun set.

The spot was found and soon all of us arrived safely through thick mist. Johan wasn't feeling too good. It was raining on and off and eventually we made supper and prepared for a long night.

Day 3- It was a rough night for Johan and we started contacting mountain rescue, lucky there were signal and a place to land. We had breakfast and packed our bags and waited for the helicopter to arrive from the hotel. In the mean time Harry, Thea and Charmaine were busy coming up the gully beneath us Johan, Christine and Ria went back to the hotel in a 3 minute helicopter ride. We then left the site and traversed back to the top of the gully to wait for Harry's group. So we were eight again (three left and we gained three).

We took to the trail and ascended and descended past the "piepietjie" next to Cathedral peak. (Anny gave this feature its new name.) The path is eroded badly and at some places quite scary; winding past Bell cave and beneath the Inner and Outer Horns and under the Chessmen. But what wonderful views greeted us – making it worth it.



Andre, Marion, Anny, Hermann,
Thea, Charmaine, Zelda, Harry

We had one scary moment when Andre was carrying Charmaine's pack. He tripped and fell over and luckily didn't fall too far. The day was getting older and the others hurried along to find a suitable place to pitch the tents. There was no water at the campsite, so Harry and I decided to go back along the path and get some water. We arrived back at the campsite just as it was getting dark. It's an awesome spot under the Mitre and in my opinion a much better place than Twins cave, that depending on the weather. The evening turned out very pleasant, we had supper, shared some of Harry and Thea's Snakebite and of to bed.

Day 4 - A breathtaking sunrise greeted us; it was a bit windy otherwise great for hiking. We set off to Twins Cave and arriving there we all agreed that the previous night spot is much better! Past Twins and up Mlambonja pass and then finally the escarpment were reached by 11 o'clock. The wind was blowing quite hard; we set off to the Kwakwatsi River in Lesotho. It was such a grand sight to see a river flowing.

The women and Andre went for a wash; Harry and I decided we'll be respectful and do the toothbrush thing! We had a delicious lunch and a rest. Lazily we put our packs on our backs – I sometimes wonder how many times



Harry and Hermann –
with map

we did that in 5 days! - and headed south past the top of Xeni pass and past the Elephant to a spot that we thought was near the Cockade pass. We made camp and settled in for what was the coldest night so far. Another great day in the Berg ended.

Day 5 - What an awesome sunrise, we were blessed with splendid views and stunning weather. There were clouds beneath us. We packed up and started off to the direction of Cockade pass. We saw the jagged edge of the Drakensberg stretching south, the mountains of Lesotho and the most beautiful scenery of mist twirling around spires and peaks.

On the top off the pass we had a break. We then descended down Cockade pass. Its steep and quite exiting! Its rough going with big boulders... I later learned from the local warden that the pass had fallen victim to flash floods, hence its poor state! We all had lunch together Thanks again for the popcorn Marion.....went down good.

After lunch the group got separated, Harry, Thea and Charmaine were lagging behind. I fell and hurt my knee, Andre gave me his hiking stick to use, and Charmaine was using mine.

It was getting later and later and when we reached the Xeni stream on the contour path we knew we were going to be hiking in the dark. From the contour path we took the path back to the hotel. With our headlamps on we carried on through the tall grass, slipping and tripping here and there. It was an experience not to be forgotten ever.

We reached the hotel and eventually Harry's bar. We shared a few pints and had a few laughs, and thought of Harry's party, sitting in a tent, somewhere along the path. Little did we know, you were on your way!!! You guys have a lot of guts!!!



Zelda, Andre, Marion, Hermann, Anny

We camped at Didima and left the next morning back to our other lives and jobs.

Hermann

Footnote: Sadly Andre was murdered, 3 weeks after this hike took place, by burglars who entered his house. We'll remember you, Andre.