

TCSA NEWS

Trails Club of SA



Who has been here? A view from Krakadouw. If anyone has photos or memories or interesting anecdotes of hikes and trails, do share them - Happy reading!
Ethnee Hepburn

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Notes and reminders

Hike leaders, PLEASE ask your hikers for reports!

Trails Club on Facebook

Remember to visit the TCSA Facebook page - Robin Cooper manages the page and a visit is worthwhile and rewarding. You will find magnificent photos of all the recent hikes and trails, providing someone has been busy with a camera. The entrants to the TCSA 2012 photographic competition are also there. Hopefully, a visit to the page will spur members to get into our mountains. To view our Facebook page follow the link: <http://www.facebook.com/TrailsClubSouthAfrica?sk=wall>

Wild Coast Hike : 15-23 February 2014

Port St Johns to Hole in the Wall

Hike Leader – Anthony Sneath

Hikers – Arabel & (daughter) Alexandra Norrish, Bernard van Ginkel, Carol Coetzee, Debbie Marshbank, Dave & (daughter) Abigail Wilson, Margie & James Humphris, Mary Holland-Ramsay

Guides – Loyiso Wohe, Mbuyiselo Mangala (Mbuy)

Porters – Anele, Patrick, Victor, Keke, Sive, Simpiwe, Ezile, Mphilisi and Delekile

“Nqoba” shouted Loyiso, our guide, as we began. We set off on another section of our hike, usually with a daunting steep incline ahead of us. The word with the click on the “q” means “we can beat it” or we can complete the 16 or so kilometers for that day! He was forever the motivator telling us that we were doing well, or that there were only one or two more inclines ahead of us, or that we had travelled more than half the distance for the day.

He said at one stage that we were walking well (and that we were the strongest party he had ever led since 2000 – a sure compliment) and that his grandparents would not be able to do what we were doing - he was then sorry in retrospect for saying such a thing as being disrespectful to them!

We were fortunate enough to be hiking – Margie and myself with 9 other TCSA members as listed above, plus 9 strong, young Xhosa porters and our two guides – Loyiso for the whole 5 days’ hike, Mbuy for the first 2 days, cut short, as he had to go to a meeting in Umtata and he then handed over to his trusted colleague, Loyiso. What an amazing man Loyiso is, a Pondo and therefore a member of the proud sub-group of the Xhosa tribe. He led us over the 65 kilometres, remembering each and every path, where to turn off the road, or off the beach, to



Perfect weather to be walking along a beautiful coastline.....



The intrepid group about to set off

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traverse a headland or cross one of the innumerable rivers either to ford it barefoot, sometimes waist deep, or be rowed across by an oarsman. He took us across the most beautiful of terrain from the Amapondo Backpackers in Port St. Johns right to the door of the Hole-in-the-Wall Hotel/Backpackers past Coffee Bay. What we loved more than the fact he knew the way to lead 20 people was that he knew the even lesser known shortcuts reserved for old walkers like us, a path that would cut across with us ending up ahead of the main, faster group! (Much to their dismay).

We were hiking in the “Wild Coast” section of the Eastern Cape or the area known as the Transkei before 1994. The area extended northwards from the Kei River, hence the name ‘Transkei’ all the way up to the Umzimvubu River at Port St Johns or even further, literally to the border of Natal at Port Edward. This is the Xhosa heartland – a stunning landscape of rolling green hills dotted with thatched rondawels offering interesting glimpses into a culture far removed from the stresses of modern life today. We were fortunate indeed to be included on the hike, organized and planned by Anthony, certainly a very capable and knowledgeable man about this part of the world. This is the 200kms stretch of coastline virtually inaccessible to all except those prepared to hike it.

The travel writer best describes it as follows : - “This untamed wilderness is an incredible, unassuming combination of breath-taking coastline, precipitous and craggy cliff faces, wild and desolate beaches, secluded bays and green rolling hills that rush headlong into deeply etched river valleys. This beauty is interfered with by few and aside from the odd collection of thatched rondawel huts is virtually uninhabited, lost in time and on a “busy” day may have one or two locals or a few Nguni cattle at the most. It is a place where hippies, surfers, hikers and

the Xhosa people live side by side with little in the way of possessions and much in the way of hospitality and friendliness. Most villages being made up of only a handful of fishermens cottages, the occasional backpacker hostel and the odd hotel. This is rural South Africa at its best, one of the most remote stretches of coastline, with some of the most beautiful coastal scenery in the world. A land of windswept cliffs, deserted white beaches, forests, crashing surf and untameable waves where hikers (like us) navigated the coastline and swam in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean.”



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Of course, being hilly mountainous country made hiking across it on a hot steaming day arduous, but one must compare toiling up a steep incline to the prize and reward of the view from the top and the joy of just being there! We walked through each day to a family settlement chosen by the local Chief to accommodate us for the night. We were warmly welcomed with the word “Molweni” (greetings) and readily accepted into their homes with the children and numerous dogs being equally pleased to see us. Everything was very neat and tidy – in fact it was equally so right throughout the region and I was certainly impressed by the standard of building and the finishing, the walls nicely plastered and painted and good face brick work on many occasions. The 11 of us would be shown to our sleeping accommodation, usually a mattress on the floor of a large (6m diameter plus) rondawel with an outside hot shower and flushing toilet to boot/noghal. The Mama of the establishment could not have been more welcoming and attentive to our needs, producing and serving a delicious meal on each of the four evenings with - can you believe - fresh crayfish and mussels on two occasions. Breakfast too would be served – mealie pap porridge, pot brood, jam and eggs to fortify us for the rigours of the forthcoming day.

Was there anything I missed? Not really – we carried



wine (carefully apportioned for each evening to celebrate the distance covered in the day and give us the courage for the distance coming up the next day). Occasionally Margie spoils me and purchased a quart of beer from a remote Spaza shop. We would ask the Mama to cool it down in a fridge – just maybe they had one available somewhere or on the one occasion, the bottle was taken to the seaside cottage of the Cape Town lawyer for whom she worked – then to be cooled to perfection in his fridge and returned to me to drink!

As we walked, smiling locals would always greet us – ‘kunjani’, (how are you) ‘siyaphela’ (I am well) sometimes saying ‘sikhona’ (I am here and alive, therefore I must be well). They often asked ‘uphumaphi’ (from whence do you come) – we would answer Port St Johns and they would raise up their hands and say ‘hauw’ (such a long way). They then asked the inevitable question ‘uyaphi’ (to where are you going) and we would say Coffee Bay/Hole-in-the-Wall. And again they would raise up their hands and say – such a long way! The people told us that the Government has improved the rural road network including a crushed slate topping on many of the roads and has introduced electricity. Water points with piped water have been introduced but I am sure water, as always, remains a problem. It can be delivered by the old rattling Toyota bakkie though. They come past us occasionally with the bags of mealie meal, the crates of beer, the coop with the chickens and of course the Mamas piled into the back with a couple in the front as well. Plus always the 20/25 litre plastic containers of water – their lifeblood.

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The healthy, sleek, fat and contented cattle plus the innumerable goats and sheep were a pleasure to see – here was their owners' wealth, growing fatter and reproducing the interest on his capital! We loved to see them on the beach - quite amusing really seeing that there was nothing to eat nor drink there. I suppose that they loved to sit on the cool, soft sea sand and chew the cud plus maybe, like us, they enjoyed the solitude. So everyone is happy and reasonably prosperous, sadly provided for by the men - the husbands and sons who are away in other provinces working, to provide the money for the anchor Mama to keep the home fires burning.

What a place – what a privilege to be able to walk through some of it and experience the way of life first hand. Thank you to those who carried our heavy packs and to those who had us to stay – dinner, bed and breakfast, we loved spending time

time with you and we learnt a lot about humility and friendliness. I want to go back and take it all in at a slower pace, appreciate the beauty, spend time looking for the bird calling in the thicket, get to know the natural remedies that were pointed out to us to smell and taste, eat more of the fruit of the Amatungalula bush and spend more time swimming in a cool estuary or rock pool – aaah but your land is beautiful! I suppose I can always re-create it in my mind and imagine being there, can't I?

Thank you especially, Loyiso, for leading us all the way so carefully with the motivation that we certainly needed to keep us going. 'Ukoyisa' – (we have beaten it)! We have completed the distance and we have succeeded. 'Nkosi kakhulu, bulela nonke' – grateful thanks to ALL of you and to Anthony for arranging such an adventurous and challenging hike. We did it!!! **James Humphris**

Constantia Corner with Nerina : 2 February 2014

Having negotiated the always exciting Cons.Corner, at Villiers Dam we turned West to look for another path to explore. However, it was rather hot so we stopped for a break above the dam wall, where we found quarried granite left over from the dam construction. Those wicked engineers of over 100 years ago cut more than was required then dumped it. We retraced our steps (sort of) and picked up the main path en route to the road. A hiker just in front of us saw a snake! (Next morning I checked out the snake book at the library and am positive it was a young Berg Adder "Bitis (yes) Atropos"! We circled the dam and had lunch on the opposite side, while watching a group of dogs swimming and

chasing ducks before their owners called them.

On the way down - half on the path, half on the road – we passed over at least three places where there had been mud slides. Remember the excessive rain in November? As Nerina said, 'No more pines, so the rain just took over'. The path is still okay, but it needs repairing before next winter. Thanks Nerina, Bob and Tommy for a great hike.

Yvonne Hiscock

Mybergh Ravine : 15 February 2014

When we started out, the temperature was 35 degrees but not in Myburgh Ravine so all five of us decided to venture on. It was hot of course but we were in the shade all the the way to the second waterfall. There was even a minute trickle of water near the top. The Disas were magnificent and made a great backdrop while we had our lunch/tea. The return downward scramble everyone managed. Thanks to Rosemary D, Pat, Saskia and Tony.

Tommy Hiscock

As Editor, I received an email recently which I thought members might be interested in. The mail is from Witsieshoek and it reads : We are a lodge in the Drakensberg and offer a great base for hikers to explore this beautiful region. Our web address is www.witsieshoek.co.za. Please feel free to browse our site and decide whether this is a useful resource for your members.

PHOTO COMPETITION

After a poor initial response, there was a last minute flurry of entries and the photographs are now being judged. We will be able to view the entries at the next AGM, which will be on Friday 4 April, at the Bergvliet High School – please try to attend.

Having been the TCSA Editor for just one year, I have, sadly, decided to resign because I am moving to Somerset West. I do plan to stay a member and to hike when I can. Who knows, when I am familiar with the Somerset West environs, I may well offer some hikes there.

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