

**SOUTH AFRICA
MAFADI: DRAKENSBERG
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By Karen Hauptfleisch**

Day 1 - Injisuthi Camp (1500m) - Centenary hut (2200m). I was "Oooing!" and "Aaahing!" and generally irritating everyone as we left Injisuthi hutted camp. It was just after 06h00 in the morning and we had the full moon, the rising sun, all the birds greeting the day and of course beautiful mountains to gawk at. My estimated "walk in the park" (only 10km and a 700m ascent) turned out to be 5 hours of huffing and puffing with some serious river crossings thrown in. "Phew!" Was I glad to see the hut?

After pitching the tents Ian started the meal of pasta, bacon and eggs. Since he always insists on hiking in style we were forced to drag loads of luxuries up the mountain. After a delicious meal some really tired people had Irish coffee and then I crawled in for the night to test my newly acquired tent.



And what a test that turned out to be?

Our first river crossing

At one stage I thought that Bernelle and I were going to be blown off the mountain but we survived and most importantly, we remained dry. (Note: Ear plugs should be an important accessory for any tent when the wind is howling). In the morning the group kindly informed me that my tent was pitched facing the wrong direction thus catching the wind. It explains a lot.

Day 2 - Centenary hut (2200m) - somewhere in Lesotho (+- 3000m): The huffing and puffing started almost immediately and when we reached Corner pass Ian declared me officially crazy for choosing this specific route. We stopped for tea on some obscure spot and then everyone seemed to notice that I was a bit pale. I was disorientated, nauseous and everything looked red to me. Luckily I was declared fit by Bernelle after informing her that the grass still looks green and by the time we were forced to take shelter I was feeling on top of the world again. Ropes were pulled out a couple of times - whether it was necessary or just for moral support - it worked and after 7 hours we were finally on top of Corner Pass. It took us another two hours of hiking in the mist before we decided to pitch the tents. And did we have different opinions

We all experienced the ascent up Corner pass differently.

Bernelle's comment, *"The map showed no route up Corner pass, it was misty, hailing, two storms and we did not know if we were climbing up to a dead end. Corner pass did, after all, flank the Trojan Wall – Harry says that the Greeks have a role everywhere but maybe he's just saying that 'cause he's Greek. At some point we walked into cliffs and decided after some ducking and diving*

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks – South Africa

to contour around them on these massively steep slopes that were like the rocky slopes of Sibebe in Swaziland but with grass on. A bit scary having only tufts of grass as foot and handholds.

The mist set in and we had some tea on a precarious spot overlooking the foothills. Very eerie!



Shortly after tea we were caught in the narrow part of the pass by hail which came thrashing down on us. With nowhere to shelter we crawled under Ian's fly sheet and chatted.

The coolest part of the pass was the last 400m, where you really have to scramble. The last part had a chimney of sorts and at some point I was standing with my feet on opposite sides of the walls, with my hands elsewhere, feeling a bit like a compromised monkey"

Caught in a hail storm: Bernelle, Lorna, Harry and Ian

Safely in our tents after the ascent and two hours walking in the mist, the conversation went something like this;

I say, "I definitely know we are either in South Africa, or Lesotho..." (I knew we weren't in Swaziland or Switzerland for that matter)

Ian says, "We are close to Mafadi"

Harry says, "According to my GPS we are 700m away from Corner pass" (implying that we have been walking around in circles).

Everybody else, "Impossible!!"



Bernelle and Ian going up before pulling the backpacks up

Day 3 - somewhere in Lesotho - top of Leslie Pass : The morning was beautiful with no mist and after intensive map reading and scouting Ian's conclusion was that Harry's GPS was right. A collective "Oh bummer!" was heard all round as we retraced our steps and headed off in another "right" direction.

Ian and I spent some time looking for Injisuthi summit cave and after a while decided that if we believed Harry's GPS, the cave was miles away. Along the way we met a Basutu herdsman and he indicated that Mafadi was west but alas Harry's GPS stated that Mafadi was about 100m east and "Voila!" There it was and what a magnificent sight. Black eagles were circling around and after something hot on South Africa's highest peak we started seriously looking for the Injisuthi summit cave. Once found another splendid sight awaited us.



Ian, Harry, Lorna and Bernelle on top of Mafadi

Considering that we were all so very fit (sic) we took the scenic route, using Harry's GPS all the time, to Lesley's pass and 9 hours after packing up our tents we pitched them again at the top of Lesley's.

Day 4 - Leslie Pass - Injusiti hutted camp: It was an absolutely breathtaking view from the top of Lesley's pass and between all the tears I could finally answer Ian's question. "No! I was not crazy. I climbed to the top of mountains because there I felt close to God." I just wish that more people could experience the breathtaking beauty of the Berg and the closeness that I felt. We were on top of the clouds for at least 2 hours before the mist

rolled in. The sound effects following every fall was quite something considering that Ian's one fall was the only ungracious one I saw but we all survived the scree and rock scrambling and Bernelle got to have her picture taken in the Marble bath pools. She considered this fortunate as we were running out of film since Harry's digital got wet during our first river crossing.

While the rest were having lunch I went to inspect Marble Cave and when I informed everyone that the sign said it was Grindstone cave, Bernelle just shook her head - I don't think anyone would have been surprised if we were in the wrong pass but it turned out that someone had switched the signs and that for once we were where we thought we should be.

We completed the remainder of the hike with me looking back many times and each time I turned to look it felt like a piece of my heart was being left behind. What a magnificent experience?



On top of Leslie's pass