

**SOUTH AFRICA
DRAKENSBERG – SHIPS PROW
APRIL 2005
By Karen Hauptfleisch**

At 8h21 on the 25th of April I send out an e-mail requesting the company of fellow hikers. The plan was to hike up Ship's prow and down Injusiti Pass. I received dissimilar responses.

At 8:30 from AC: *Jy is mal!*

At 9:45 from HH's: *HieHa – I'm in!*

At 12:36 from AA:

Ships Prow: Introduction: This is one tough pass. The fact that I walked it in thick mist doesn't help too much either in my evaluation of it, but this certainly is a pass to be reckoned with. Yet, because it forms such a nice round trip escarpment traverse with Greys, it is often walked. There are two gully's here and the eastern most one must be one of the most challenging walks in the berg. Attempts to close this pass by blasting affect it more than most of the passes that suffered this indignity at the turn of the last century, and there is a fair amount of loose unpleasant walking. I don't think Ships prow is a very pretty pass or for that matter very useful. However, as far as a challenge goes its right up there with the monsters in Mweni

Access walk: There are two routes in to the base of this route, about equidistant in length. The more commonly used is the route via Monks Cowl. One ascends via the same route as for Gray's, but rather than heading off north along the contour path, a route South is taken. The walk along the contour path from Monks is long, with quite a bit of climbing before you descend to the base of the pass. It's a long gentle downhill onto the boulder bed that forms the pass.

The route from Injasuti also seems a bit of climbing up from the camp. You head for the contour path, which keeps a little more level once the climb is over, before it too dips towards the pass. The route into the pass has changed a bit, and while you used to have to descend a little side stream onto the main boulder bed, there appears to be something of a path that now takes one to approximately the same height as the Monks access on the other side of the boulder bed.

Pass Route: Once on the boulder bed there is little to do but point your nose for the top. However, after a couple of kilometres of walking on the river bed, the easier route leaves steeply to the west, meaning you head to the west of the "prow" Its steep and loose in places. There are some cairns that indicate the way, but often these seem confused and it may well be easier to make your own route. There are a couple of scrambles in the mid section of the pass before you finally make it to grassy slopes. These steadily ease as one approaches the top, which is very high. You top out well above 3200m, making this one of the highest pass summits in the berg. To locate the pass from the top, one summits the ridge coming west off Champagne Castle peak. Here there are some cairns that lead you to the summit. Be careful to choose the route to the west, unless you are feeling adventurous.

Water on pass and Summit: Water is only a problem on the approach walks, where the path keeps high and dry. Once in the pass, there is a weak stream until the really steep bits, from where it is dry in all but the wettest summers. However, the summit is dry, and water is a 10 minute walk towards Grays or west into Lesotho.

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks – Drakensberg – Ships prow

Caves and Campsites: There is a campsite one valley before the pass on the Monks approach. There is also some OK gravelly sites in the river bed in the early parts of the pass. Injasuti approach lacks any good camping. Neither approach has decent caves on route, with Grindstone cave the closest on the Injasuti side. The summit cave is Nkosazana, which is close to the summit of Gray's pass, 45min from the summit of ships prow.

30 April 2005: 11h05. The hike up Ship's prow started officially at Monk's Cowl EKZNW Camp. Hikers present: Ian, Harry, Andre, Karin and me.

12h05: Hiker's still present and keen to go up Ship's prow: Ian, Harry and me. Andre and Karin decided to turn back and go for the easier day-hike options. After another hour's hiking Ian decided that it was time for some of his sub-standard Canadian sardines and to prove that they really do exist – I can add a picture.

At Blind Man's corner we met some fellow hikers heading for Zulu cave and Shirelle's response to where we were heading was "its bouldary".

It was another 10km of energy sapping hiking before we did our first bundu bashing close to where we decided to pitch our tent.

Pretty soon it was time to do what we do best:

- *Harry and Ian did some cooking*
- *I admired Harry and Ian's cooking skills while sipping some sherry*



Moi, admiring Harry and Ian's cooking skills while sipping some Anti-Freeze



Ian cooking



Harry bundu bashing

After a wonderful meal consisting of chicken, loads of cheese and whatever, the sky cleared and ship's prow became visible. That and a million stars. O boy, life just can't get any better.



Ian's substandard Canadian sardines

I woke up several times during the night – staring at the sky with it's million's of stars. I was also fortunate to watch the sunrise – without waking the others. By 6h00 the ants were starting to eat me alive and I could not get the other two going fast enough. The sun beetles were also going crazy.

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks – Drakensberg – Ships prow

The first 3 km were not steep – but it involved a lot of bundu bashing, or maybe we followed the wrong path.



Ships Prow – 4.5 km away

Before long it was time to make a decision. Do we take the left- hand fork which is easier but longer or the right-hand one? The decision was unanimous. We had perfect weather and we were all still feeling strong.

I was on my hands and knees a lot of the time going up. I loved the boulders but tried my best to avoid the scree. Luckily I was wearing my gloves because some of the grass turned out to be really nasty. My heart was beating like crazy and once on top when I asked myself why I did it the answer came at once. The view was breathtaking. I loved touching the rocks.

I loved touching the grass. It's about the way my heart beats. It's about the black eagles soaring above my head. It's about living, not just surviving.

I loved every moment. And so did Harry and Ian – bless them.

After taking some photos we had another 3km to hike before we pitched the tent and history repeated itself. The food was excellent and the anti-freeze warmed the bones.

That night there was a lot of tossing and turning in the tent and it was not just on my side. Our plan to watch the sun rise on Grey's pass failed since we had to wait for the tent to defrost before packing up. But we did have coffee (with some frozen ideal milk) near the cape vulture retreat and by 9h00 we started our hike down what we thought was Grey's Pass.



The view was indescribable

I tried my best to follow the non-existent path and couldn't quite understand how Dawid Bristow can say it's the most used pass in the Berg, especially when Ian said we'll need ropes to get down a specific section. Harry handed him a rope and I was just about to say we should turn back when Ian declared that his buffy fell down the cliff and that we will just have to go down. While Harry and myself shouted simultaneously that we'll buy him a new one, Ian disappeared down the cliff. I was next and after another half an hour Harry was down safely as well.

It took a lot of contouring getting to a distinctive Grey's path but we made it eventually. Harry took some awesome pictures and after studying the map for 10 minutes we realize that the gully we took was not on the map. Ian must either be a good actor or we were never in danger – but I never once felt unsafe.

From Keith Bush camp it was another 16 km's of marching and I got a feeling of how it must have been in the army. But the Berg was awesome and although the last 5.5km via The Spinx felt like 15km, I would definitely recommend at least a day trip around Monk's cowl.

Was it worth it? I'll do it again tomorrow. It was awesome!!!!!!! I loved ship's prow.