



TREKKING IN SOUTH AFRICA'S 'DRAGON MOUNTAINS' 11 – 18 July 2009



JULY CAMP 2009 - GIANT'S CASTLE



On 10 July all the participants to this year's UIAA Global Youth Summit Meet were in South Africa, ready to take on this adventure! They were accommodated in a Backpacker's Lodge in Dunkeld, Johannesburg. After a light Continental breakfast - sponsored by the Lodge - we left Johannesburg by 8 a.m. and headed down to Kwa-Zulu Natal, or more specifically, to the Giant's Castle Reserve, a drive of just under seven hours. Our gear was loaded onto a tractor and trailer and taken to Base Camp, about five kilometres from the main entrance to the Reserve where vehicles were left and we walked the rest of the way.

The site for the Youth Meet was in the historic Giant's Castle Reserve - home of the eland and the majestic bearded vulture (pictured above) - which lies in the Central Berg region of the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park, a World Heritage Site. The area is very well known for its superb examples of rock art created by the San people, the early inhabitants of the area, and the Lammergeyer (bearded vulture) is endemic to this region.

Base Camp was based north-east of the outcrop known as the Chimney Pot (Maqomfa 1 894m) and overlooked the Mammedeni Stream, and was very rustic! I wondered how our guests would cope especially with the bathroom and toilet facilities! But cope they did and quite honestly, I think they enjoyed it! Sunday saw everyone go out for the day to visit the Main Caves Museum - an overhang with San rock art. This rock art is a reflection of the life of the San as they lived thousands of years ago, depicting hunting scenes, religious beliefs, commercial life, dancing and their everyday struggle to survive.

But mostly that day was to get a feel for the very different terrain. Back at Base Camp our guides Rob and Sonja checked food rations for the next five days out of camp. The idea was to reach the Escarpment via Langalibalela Pass and over the next few days traverse north and come down again via Bannerman Pass, but a quick change of weather had Rob re-thinking the plans! At Centenary Hut strong winds snapped the poles of one tent and then, just a kilometre before Bannerman Hut, Lis injured her ankle. The party stopped short at Bannerman Hut and Rob decided instead to do a one-day push up and back down Bannerman pass on Wednesday. Sadly the top 400m of the pass was iced up and 150m from the top Rob decided that the risk of a serious fall meant that it was time to abandon the objective and head back to the hut. Wednesday night was bitterly cold. The temperature was measured at -10° . The Hut was used for meals and socialising.

And it snowed!

A snowman was built before the group headed down, back to base camp. On the way they were met by a mounted police border patrol and one of the policemen gallantly gave up his mount, putting Lis onto the horse which he then led down to the camp.



The next day found the group climbing to the top of the Chimney Pot and then they found some rocks suitable for bouldering. Later that afternoon everyone gathered in the Boma - gifts were exchanged and the party began! We celebrated three birthdays that week: one on the day we travelled down to Giant's Castle; Marina on that Friday and Lis' birthday the day we travelled back. Vusi, the head cook, had baked each of the girls a birthday cake which he presented to them. After the party people started packing as much of their gear in readiness for the next morning's early departure. Packing done, some more fun and games and a flurry of notes exchanging emails and FaceBook addresses. How wonderfully this group had bonded and what a privilege to have been involved with them. That night around the campfire the Staff sang to the group, ending with a rendition of the beautiful South African National Anthem, *Nkosi sikelel' i Afrika* (God Bless Africa).

Participants:

We had 20 international participants from UK, France, Spain, Italy, South Tyrol and 4 South Africans.

- CAI - Italy**
 - Aldo Scorsoglio
 - Giuseppe (Pippo) Bianchi
 - Carla Ruello
 - Luca Bulla
 - Simone Rossi
 - Carlo Barilani
 - Peter Beatrice
 - Sara Quercetti
 - Marina Fico
- Alpenverein Südtirol** Hansjörg Pircher
- FFCAM (Chamonix)** Laure Gachon
- The Alpine Club** Toby Call
- FEDME - Spain**
 - Miguel Sanchez Canovas
 - Guillermo Rogel Cifuentes
 - Alba Sanchez Esteban
 - Irene Dorado Avila
 - Lis Alvares de Cienfuego Garcia
 - Christina Avila Montero
 - Jaime Sumozas Arribas
- FEEC - Spain** Daniel Solà Riu
- MCSA**
 - Hanlie Jordaan
 - Joshua Bedford
 - Debbie Mulder
 - Lee-Ann Morris
- Swiss Alpine Club** Anita Rohner (non-Youth Meet participant)
- Our Guides**
 - Rob Thomas
 - Sonja Parnell

Our sincere thanks to our two guides and also to the July Camp Administrator Rikki Abbott and her helpers: Lindy, Ron and the members of the kitchen staff. And, of course, to all our contributors and sponsors - thank you! Jenny Paterson - Meet Administrator

(More photographs can be found on the home page of The MCSA: go to <http://www.mcsa.org.za> for a slide show!)