

The Mountain Club of South Africa, under the auspices of the UIAA Youth Commission,
presents



**TREKKING IN SOUTH AFRICA'S 'DRAGON MOUNTAINS'
a UNESCO World Heritage Site**

9 – 16 July 2011



(Photo: The Amphitheatre: extreme left is Eastern Buttress and on the extreme right is Sentinel - 4 kilometres separate the two!)

The Mountain Club of South Africa (97 Hatfield Street, Cape Town 8001, South Africa; (<http://mcsa.org.za>) invites Member Federations of the UIAA to participate in a Global Youth Summit in South Africa: Trekking in the 'Dragon Mountains'.



*Over it all stands the Drakensberg itself, timeless, aloof, inscrutable, but with a wild beauty of its own that tugs at the heartstrings. It is a world of indescribable and ever-changing splendour, a world of basalt giants that stand as sentinels on the roof of South Africa; a world of unspoiled nature, where the cry of the martial eagle breaks the silence of distant peaks, where the thunder roars and winds shriek through lonely crags like dragons in torment; where giant yellowwoods dream away their age-long sleep in hidden valleys, and where man, in all this vast loneliness, can find himself (RO Pearse, *Barrier of Spears – Drama of the Drakensberg*, Art*

Publishers, 2006).

Meet Administrator/Contact Person:

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Mountain Leader/Guide: Rob Thomas

Qualifications: Rock Climbing Instructor and Mountain Walking Instructor: Mountaineering and Training Development Trust; Rock Climbing and Mountain Walking Guide:

South African National Qualifications: National Convenor: Mountain Club of South Africa Search & Rescue with 16 years mountain rescue experience. Formal qualifications in various aspects of rescue. Accredited rescue instructor (University of Johannesburg).

TREKKING IN SOUTH AFRICA'S 'DRAGON MOUNTAINS'

Location/General



The 'Dragon Mountains' of South Africa are actually called the *Drakensberg*: 'Drake' means dragons and 'berg' means mountain - a mythical name recalling fire-breathing monsters high up in impenetrable crags. It is also called *uKhahlamba*, meaning 'Barrier of Spears' by the local Zulu people living in the foothills of this spectacular mountain range, referring to the great pinnacles and towers.

The uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park constitutes 243 000 ha of wilderness with a mountain chain span of 150 kilometres at an average altitude of 3000m (http://www.kznwildlife.com/mountains_dest.htm). It was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2000. Of particular significance is that it is one of only 23 such worldwide that fulfilled both criteria of cultural and natural properties. As such the Drakensberg, the highest range south of Kilimanjaro, offers superb outdoor opportunities ranging from trekking, bouldering, rock climbing, bird watching, mountain photography to mountain biking, horse riding and fishing in

the foothills, as well as just relaxing.

The Drakensberg mountain range rises from 1400m from its base in the east on the KwaZulu-Natal midlands to the 'top'. However, there is no 'other side' when one reaches the summit around 3000m: one finds oneself on an undulating escarpment plateau stretching westwards far into the 'Mountain Kingdom' of Lesotho; the cliffs that one ascends having been formed by æons of erosion. Breaching the escarpment with its cliffs of up to 500m are various gullies and cutbacks that allow walking access to the summit plateau.

While ascending to the escarpment the change in altitude is accompanied by a change in geology and vegetation from grassland and bushveld in the valleys, with their sheer sandstone cliffs (at around 2000m) that shelter virgin forest pockets, to towering basalt towers and buttresses with sub-alpine vegetation at the top: truly magnificent scenery and an education on the formation of the earth. As the subcontinent's most important water catchment area, crystal clear streams run down the mountain to join and form South Africa's major rivers.

Mont-aux-Sources is a mountain block, forming one of the highest and most spectacular portions of the Drakensberg. It includes the Sentinel, a spectacular wall of just under 400 vertical metres (1000 feet). The high point of the massif is actually an inconspicuous protuberance, but it is important in that it forms the triangular corner where Lesotho meets the South African provinces of Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Free State. The mountain is also the source of 3 major rivers (hence the name *Mont-aux-Sources*) which in places plunge spectacularly down the mountain wall. Tugela Falls (pictured above) for example, is the world's second highest waterfall. The total drop in five free-leaping falls is 948m (3110 feet).

Cultural heritage: The San (Bushmen) inhabited the Drakensberg from the late Stone Age times until the late nineteenth century. They had very few material possessions and did not build permanent shelters, but lived either under sandstone overhangs or temporary grass shelters. They left some of the finest and richest examples of rock art in the world: 30 000 individually painted images in 520 different rock shelters have been recorded in the park. The most common types of paintings are animal figures with many eland, a buck that they considered sacred, and human figures depicting their way of life. It is truly an awe inspiring experience to view this rock art.



Fauna and flora: Because of the difference in altitude, there is great diversity of plant and animal life. Though not offering the Big Five, for which Africa is really famous, there are mountain reedbuck, grey rheebuck, grey

duiker, eland, klipspringer, bushbuck and oribi. The main predators in the Drakensberg are leopard (found in very small numbers), black-backed jackal, caracal, serval, clawless and spotted neck otter, various species of mongoose and genet. Troops of chacma baboons, porcupines and colonies of rock hyrax are also found throughout this mountain park. The Drakensberg is home to over 300 species of birds of which 32 are endemic to Southern Africa. The Drakensberg is also home to 25 species of amphibians, 18 species of lizard (six of which are endemic) and 21 species of snake.

Especially from spring to autumn a huge variety of beautiful flowers can be found.

The Drakensberg in July:

July is winter in South Africa: it is dry and cold with a possibility of snowfall. Nevertheless daytime temperatures can be a mild 10°-14° Celsius. Night temperatures can be down to -10° (or even -15°) Celsius. Although the altitude is at the low end of the high-altitude scale (\pm 3100m / 10,000'), the weather in the Drakensberg is not to be taken lightly - it is probably the only mountain range in the world that has experienced snowfall on every day of the year without actually having any permanent snowfields.

The Mountain Club of South Africa

The Mountain Club of South Africa is the second oldest in the world having been founded in 1891 (for more info see <http://www.mcsa.org.za>). It comprises 14 geographically spread Sections, including one in neighbouring Namibia.

Overview of the traverse

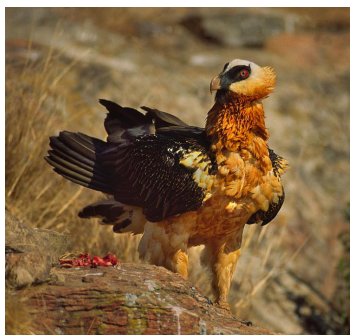
We will start in Johannesburg and drive to the Witsieshoek Mountain Resort (pictured) where we will be accommodated for the night (the drive will be a long one!); the next morning we will gain access to the Amphitheatre via a chainladder - and for the next few days and nights experience this spectacular and unique world!



This is an interesting region of South Africa. The frequent snow on the Drakensberg mountain peaks surrounding the town of Phuthaditjhaba led the San to call the region QwaQwa (*whiter than snow*). It was known as Witsieshoek (literal translation *white corner*) to the European settlers.

This trip runs from north to south across the escarpment of South Africa's northern Drakensberg for a distance of about 65km, most of which is off-trail. It starts off at the Sentinel Car Park and loosely follows the escarpment edge (with few deviations) to descend into the Cathedral Peak area via one of three possible passes: Mlamboja, Xeni or Cockade Passes - the decision will be made by our Head Guide. Drakensberg passes can be daunting affairs with altitude differences of anything up to 1200m (4000') in distances as short as 3km (1,8 miles). However, few of these passes are actually dangerous - they simply test your resolve and your endurance.

That said, do not underestimate this trip - it stands on its own as well worth doing.



The opportunities for seeing and photographing Cape Vulture, Jackal Buzzard and Rock Kestrel are excellent, while the Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus Barbatus*, a.k.a. Lammergeier - pictured left) will occasionally put in an appearance. In addition, the sunrises can be spectacular and the lighting makes for brilliant photographic moments. Adding to this the Drakensberg has some truly spectacular scenery, with the escarpment dropping away 1000m (3300 ft) to the 'Little Berg' at 2000m (6500'). The altitude also means that you're above a large percentage of earth's atmospheric muck. When coupled with the low levels of light pollution in this region the result is a night sky full of stars seldom seen over land.

Daily distances vary from 8 to 16 km with a maximum altitude gain for a single day of 600m and a maximum

descent for a single day of 1400m (4600'). Overnight spots vary from wilderness camp-sites (literally camping wherever you like) to some stunningly beautiful and well-protected caves with breathtaking views.

Aims/Focus:

Our main focus will be on mountaineering and protection of our environment; our aim will be to gain a better understanding of our cultural differences by close interaction and sharing this experience with our participants.

Participants:

Applications from participants aged 16 - 25 (the minimum age has been dropped as different Federations have different definitions for 'Youth') will be considered. Participants need to be members of Federations affiliated to the UIAA. The number of 16-year-old participants will be limited to a maximum of 6 in total. Participants under the age of 18 years to be accompanied by a Youth leader over the age of 25 years. (The ratio should be 1 Youth Leader to accompany no more than three 16-year-old participants. Youth Leaders over the age of 25, accompanying participants, will be considered).

Cost = ZAR 3250 per person.

The cost is quoted in South African Rands due to currency fluctuations (but converts to approximately €350 at the time of this document - Dec 2010). This costing is based upon a MINIMUM number of 15 participants; and a MAXIMUM number of 22. A conversion into Euros will be made available to participants prior to their departure for South Africa, as the South African currency is not readily available in Europe.

Includes:

- transportation from Johannesburg to the mountains, and back;
- trekking permits;
- all meals on the trek;
- accommodation at the Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge - dinner, bed and breakfast included;
- tents (3 person tents to be shared by 2);

Excludes:

- Cost of international airfare;
- airport transfers (depending on arrival dates of participants);
- accommodation outside of the actual programme;
- cost of visas;
- personal gear items - a suggested list will be provided to participants in final information.

Requirements for Participants

Good fitness is required, as well as preparedness for camping/bivouacking in temperatures from typically below 0°C at night, to 20°C at midday; carrying a five or six day backpack with own gear plus a share of communal camping equipment, tents, food, etc.

Programme

Saturday 9 July: luxury bus to the Drakensberg Mountains - a drive of approximately 5½-6 hours. Overnight at the Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge.

Sunday 10 to Friday 15 July: Drakensberg traverse, descent from the Escarpment

Saturday 16 July: early breakfast; strike camp; walk out to awaiting transport for the return journey to Johannesburg - either direct to O R Tambo International Airport or overnight accommodation. A detailed programme will be made available to successful applicants.

Meeting point

This will depend on international flight arrival times . . . Participants should ideally arrive at O R Tambo International Airport before 10h00 on Saturday, 9 July; or Friday afternoon (for daylight flights) arrivals are also possible. . NB: **Logistics can only be finalised once the international flight details are known and will then be distributed to participating Federations.**

Deadline for registration:

Please advise the meet administrator by 15 April 2011 of the number of spaces your Federation would like to book so that the transportation and accommodation can be confirmed - this is important as the deposits we pay are non-refundable!

Thereafter an application form should be completed and returned to Jenny Paterson of the MCSA (see page 1 for details) as soon as possible, or at the latest by **Friday, 13 May 2011**. Successful applicants will be informed week commencing **16 May 2011**. If the MCSA does not receive the **names by 13 May 2011** it may mean non-attendance for your representatives.