



MCSA NATIONAL MEET 2024
hosted by
JULY CAMP 2024 at COBHAM
(Arrive for lunch, Friday 28th June, depart after breakfast, Sunday 7th July 2024)

NATIONAL MEET DINNER at UNDERBERG COUNTRY CLUB
Saturday 6th July 2024.

We chose to return to the well-loved Cobham Reserve in the Southern Drakensberg.



Graeme Bruschi

THE NATIONAL MEET and JULY CAMP, 2024

July Camp 2024, was designated the National Meet by the National President of the Central Committee of the Mountain Club of South Africa who bestowed a special honour on the July Camp for being the longest continuously running hiking and mountain camp in the annals of the MCSA and, we believe, almost anywhere else in the world.

July Camp was started in 1919, the same year as the independent Natal Mountain Club was founded which later became the KwaZulu-Natal Section of the MCSA.

So, in addition to the customary and well-loved July Camp traditions and events that draw the regulars back year after year, and also attract newcomers every year, there also will be two other



specific events that are common to all National Meets. These are the schedule of planned and advertised Day Walks, Overnight Hikes and Climbs, which may even include ice climbs if the weather favours the ice-climbers. There also will be a National Dinner at the Underberg Country Club on Saturday 6th July 2024.

Cobham offers all walkers, hikers, campers, climbers and mountaineers, regardless of age, a wide range of activities in the Berg ranging from easy to severe. This area is well supplied with caves that offer enticing sub-camping opportunities.

There is an unlimited number of beautiful trips “to there and back” as well as the more defined trips to specific objectives such as some of the closer caves and well-known river pools. Of course, each of these could serve as part of a longer sub-camping trip. If the trip you want to do lacks a convenient cave or caves, then carrying tents is the real “Berging and Backpacking” answer!

CHOICE OF TRIPS AND ACTIVITIES

Day visits to some nearby caves and day-walks will be posted on a billboard daily.

For those who seek the challenge of a longer trip or to traverse the High Berg, there are several **mountain-passes** up to the Escarpment. The most frequently used seem to be Amakhela Pass (Altitude 2,906m), Masubasuba Pass (Altitude 3,074m) and Minaret Pass (Altitude 2,888m). Snow could make the going difficult.

Suggested overnight bookings based on most caves being within a 4.5 hour walk from the Camp are: a 1-night 2-day or a 2-night 3-day (visiting 2 caves) or a 3 to 4-night escarpment trip. Popular caves include Gxalingenwa, Lakes, Spectacle, Pholela, Chameleon and Weaver, each of which can sleep 12 people. Then Nutcracker sleeps 6, Venice sleeps 4 and the tiny Gorge Cave sleeps 2. Other caves are Glade (4), Ngengwa (8) and Sakeng (2). The number that Bath Plug Cave can accommodate is debatable!

Actual trips and their Leaders will be announced closer to the date and your choice of nights away from Base Camp can be modified accordingly. Knowing, with reasonable accuracy, who will be in Camp on a given night, is important for full-board catering.

The Giant’s Cup Hiking Trail, which totals 59 kilometres, lies in the Little Berg and ascends and descends several steep climbs as it winds its well-designed route from Sani Pass to Bushman’s Nek. The first day of the Trail starts at Sani and ends at Cobham at the Pholela Hut. Doing sections of this Trail would require that you arrange transport to the start or from the end points and will require independent booking and an additional fee.

Sub-camp Leaders will book caves in advance, directly with the Cobham Office. Telephone landlines: 033 702 0831 or 033 702 0171. Mobiles 082 629 9338 or 083 962 3934.

IN ADDITION, OPPORTUNITIES EXIST FOR:

- **bird-watching** and Berg photography
- **comparisons** between Berg grassland, Protea open woodland and patches of indigenous forest
- **game-viewing** that could include eland, oribi, common and mountain reedbuck, grey rhebuck, baboon, grey duiker, jackal and caracal.

- **San art.** The San occupation of the **Sipongweni Cave** and their famous rock art led to the cave being awarded the status of a National Heritage Site. Some of the MCSA members are registered Rock Art Guides and will accompany groups, by arrangement, during the week.
- **children's activities.** They are our Club's future and are most welcome to enjoy this experience. Children must be accompanied and supervised by an adult who will take full responsibility for their welfare and safety.
- **varying levels of fitness and equipment.** Activities will be of varying levels of difficulty. If joining a group on a more strenuous hike, do ensure that you are of comparable fitness so that all will enjoy the experience. The Leaders will describe their trips and may be consulted beforehand.

CAMPERS ARE OFFERED:

- A Base Camp that runs for **9 nights (28th June – 6th July)**. Campers are welcome to attend for just a few nights or for the whole period.
- The traditional July Camp **full-board option** (lunch, dinner, breakfast) which includes hearty open-air cooked meals at Base Camp and the time-tested standard selection of provisions for sub-camps and day trips.
- **A self-catering option** for those who prefer this style of camping in which the Campers supply ALL their own food and cooking needs for both Base Camp and sub-camping. Braai stands are provided in the Campsite. **Note: Please bring your own charcoal.**
- Early morning coffee at your tent and coffee and tea **for ALL Campers** at morning and afternoon tea times in the dining area.
- **A campfire enclosure** where, weather permitting, all Campers can gather for an evening singsong, chat, maybe a drink or two of their own favourite tipple and some of their own snacks. After supper, hot cocoa will be served around the campfire.
- **Hot showers, flush toilets** and even mirrors, although the campsite itself is essentially rustic.

There are **NO electrical plug points**, nor are generators permitted. Plugs in the office and the Pholela Hut, are **not** available for our use. Use of power banks or solar powered chargers for cellphone chargers is advised.



Graeme Bruschi

- Signal reception is very poor but it can be found by walking some distance from the Office.



Graeme Bruschi

CAMP FEES and FINANCES:

- **Full board** – R390 per adult per night and R245 per child under 12 per night. This includes three meals, beverages and the overnight fees of the Reserve.
- **Self-catering** – R195 per adult per night and R120 per child under 12 per night. This payment includes the overnight fees of the Reserve as well as early morning coffee and tea and coffee at morning and afternoon tea times.
- **Non-MCSA members** are most welcome and pay an additional R100 Non-Member levy. This may be redeemed against future membership of KZN Section of the MCSA.
- **National Meet Dinner:** R200 pp. Separate application using the Link on page 5.
- **Tips:** Please remember the cooks. These dedicated four men rise at day-break to start the fires and to make early morning coffee on the gas stove, and to prepare breakfast. They are on duty until after supper when all the pots and pans have been scrubbed. For many years now, July Camp has been their only regular work in the year. Please support them.
- **Maps:** The latest coloured maps for this area are the double-sided, weather-proof Drakensberg South Maps by Slingsby, including both No. 5 Cobham and No. 6 Garden Castle. They are available from the shop at Cobham at R60 each, or they may be obtained beforehand from Ezemvelo, P O Box 13609, Cascades, 3202 or customerservice@kznwildlife.com. Also available, in Base Camp, are the classic MCSA set of Drakensberg maps at R10 per set.
- **Rock Art Guides:** Visiting **Sipongweni Cave** without one is discouraged

BOOKING and CANCELLATION: Booking is on a first-come-first-served basis and numbers may have to be restricted so do book early to avoid disappointment. The deadline is **31st May 2024**.
REFUNDS: will be given if written notice of cancellation is received **before 31st May 2024**. We reserve the right to retain a 20% booking fee after the 31st May 2024.

APPLICATION TO ATTEND THE CAMP

Please use the on-line form using this link

<https://forms.gle/3jRXyNSfDGcQCLDf9>

To confirm booking please pay before 31st May 2024.

EFT PAYMENTS ONLY

MCSA (KZN) Branch STANDARD BANK ACCOUNT NO: 051207141, Branch code: 051001
 REFERENCE: JC (for July Camp) then surname and initials

APPLICATION TO ATTEND THE NATIONAL MEET DINNER – UNDERBERG COUNTRY CLUB

Please use the on-line form using this link

<https://forms.gle/m3XgGwxc51UBUdQj7>

FURTHER INFORMATION and ENQUIRIES

If you are uncertain or are a First Timer

Please email Rikki Abbott Wedderburn at ronwedd@netactive.co.za

Those wishing to drive up to attend only the Dinner can book into the Pholela Hut at the Camp site (18 Bunks available) or book into one of the many Airbnb's in the Underberg area.

RECOMMENDED ROUTE to COBHAM: GPS co-ordinates 29°42'08.22"S 29°24'52.95"E

Follow the N3 to Howick (Exit 99 South of Howick) then take the R617 through Boston, and Bulwer to Underberg (115 km, best to refuel in Underberg). At the service station take the sign-posted road to Himeville (5.7 km). Just at the entry to Himeville take a sign-posted left turn into New Street. The tar ends here and after 14.2km of good dirt road (D7) you will arrive at Ezemvelo's Cobham Reserve and the Drakensberg World Heritage Site. Park your vehicle and report to the Bell Tent to let us know of your safe arrival. Then find your chosen camp site and once you have unloaded your kit, please re-park at the parking area near the Pholela Hut.



Gerhard Venter

CHECK-LIST OF ESSENTIAL ITEMS and KIT

Sub-zero temperatures are to be expected. Strong winds and snow may occur.

Tent: Please bring your own mountain tent. If you take your Base Camp tent sub-camping, there is a MCSA tent where you can store some excess kit. Car mounted roof tents *etc.*, should be sited with generous consideration for those using tents.

Bedding: Bedding rated for sub-zero temperatures at night is essential.

Clothing: Sun-hat and high SPF sun-screen. Generally, days are sunny and mild, but nights are very cold. Waterproof, windproof and warm gear are essential along with beanie, scarf, warm socks, gloves, boots suitable for hiking and strolling. These should be sturdy, supportive and water-repellant. Comfortable light footwear is advised for Base Camp.

Rucksack: Appropriate to intended activities.

Torch and spare batteries.

Water bottle.

Specific dietary needs, medication and first-aid equipment.

Toiletries: Please include biodegradable soap/shampoo and a towel. Lip ice and hand cream are recommended.

Zip-lock bags: for day hikes and sub-camps and larger rubbish bags for ALL the rubbish generated.

Mess kits: Those enjoying **full board** will need all their own eating utensils, preferably two sets of plates, bowls, knives, forks, spoons and mugs. One set is for use in Base Camp and the other on your sub-camps and day hikes. **N.B. Please bring your own Billy cans, stoves, containers and plastic bags** for portioning sub-camp catering or day hike lunches. Your Leader will select the best equipment for the trip.

Plastic bucket/basin and biodegradable washing powder: for water and washing clothes.

Sweets, snacks, drinks: to share at the campfire, on sub-camps or on day hikes.

Cash: see Tips, Maps *etc.* on page 4

MCSA card and passport: You are advised always to carry your current MCSA membership card. Passports are required for those who cross into Lesotho.

If required:

- **Trekking poles.**
- All Climbers are to bring their **own gear**.
- **Small/narrow folding chair or stool** as space around the camp-fire is limited. Bigger chairs are welcome furniture but at your tent.
- **Gas stove, fuel and containers** for day hikes, sub-camps and if self-catering at Base Camp. **Open fires and candles are NOT permitted anywhere.**

AT CAMP PLEASE BE REMINDED

SAFETY:

- **Each Camper must sign the Mountain Register** at our **Base Camp** before leaving on a hike. Hiking alone is discouraged. A minimum group size of **three** is advised.
- **If going on a day hike** indicate your destination and estimated time of return.
- **If going on a sub-camp** indicate your destination, dates, estimated time of return and major points along your route.
- **The Leader is to carry the tear-off stub from the Register.** This is vital information for use in the case of any accident or emergency.
- **Each Camper leaving Base Camp is advised to carry** water, adequate warm and waterproof clothing, a torch, spare batteries and a cell phone, no matter how short their trip away from Camp.

CATERING:

Self-caterers must be **fully self-sufficient for ALL meals in Base Camp, on day trips and on sub-camps.** They are very welcome to share the tea and coffee in the dining area at morning and afternoon tea times..... listen for the tea gong at 11:00 or 16:00 hrs. if you are in camp.

Full board

- Our cooks will provide **three meals per day**, according to their prepared menu, and all beverages.
- Pre-packed, lightweight food is provided for **Leaders to collect** for sub-camp trips.
- Leaders who would like to plan their sub-camp catering in advance may request a copy of the food list *via* e-mail.
- Vegetable dishes are served but no specific dish is reserved for vegetarians. Those whose application states Vegetarian, are given vegetable cup-soup packets and extra rations of cheese and eggs to add when required.
- **N.B. If you have specific dietary needs you are advised to provide your own supplements to the basic catered fare.**

COOKING AREA:

Although we are drawn to the warmth of the cooking area, please **avoid** standing around the cooks' fires and cooking pots.

Please keep out of the way and on the other side of the serving tables where the cooks prepare and/or serve the food.

DINING AREA:

After each course, basins with hot water are provided on the serving tables for each of us to wash and rinse our own eating utensils and then put them to drain on the last table.

To facilitate efficiency and the flow past the serving tables, please help maintain the two separate queues for collecting meals and for washing up.

Second helpings are allowed when **all** have collected their first helping so preferably be on time when the meal gong sounds.

URGENT MESSAGES: From Monday 24th June 2024 and for the duration of July Camp 2024, urgent messages may be directed to the Cobham Camp staff during Office Hours on

Landlines 08h00 to 15h30 033 702 0831 or 033 702 0171

Cell Phones James Mthembu 083 962 3934

 Margaret Mdlala 082 629 9338

Please remember reception is poor and keep trying.

Organizing Committee 2024

Rikki Abbott Wedderburn, Carl Dreyer, Merv Gavin, Carolyn Higgs, Malikah Makz-Parker, Lesley McGwynne, Karen Miller, Graham Smith, Simon Vickers.

Assisted at Advance Party by

Henry Coppens, Pam McNamara, Roger Paul, Romi Reinecke, Rev Kev Robertson, Graham Stansell, Etienne Step, Marilla Vorster.



Graeme Bruschi

RULES AND REGULATIONS - INCLUDING COMPLIANCE WITH THE EZEMVELO KZN WILDLIFE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

July Camp, representing MCSA, endorses a comprehensive system of environmental practices that address, *inter alia*, conditions of access, admissible structures, services, monitoring, auditing and decommissioning, reinstatement and rehabilitation, pollution and the impact of the event on soil, animals, vegetation and other area users.

WATER QUALITY

The Berg is the main watershed for KwaZulu-Natal, so all Campers are required to use biodegradable soaps and shampoo and to ensure that grey water is dispersed directly onto a grassed area and not into a watercourse. When out of Base Camp, all Campers are required to observe bush-toilet etiquette.

SOIL CONSERVATION

No soap/shampoo of any kind to be used in the streams and rivers. Please wash and rinse yourself, your hair and your clothes on the bank, sufficiently far from the river so that the water does not flow directly back into the river or stream.

WASTE

The principle of '**what we carry in, we carry out**' applies. Participation in July Camp is on the understanding that each Camper will carry out **all** the rubbish he/she generates both in Base Camp and on day trips and sub-camps.

NOISE is not permitted.

This includes technically augmented music, radios and drones. The sense of peace and nature's environment is not to be disturbed or invaded.

MONITORING

The site is monitored for environmental impact before and after the event.

FLORA and FAUNA

If any sensitive species (*e.g.* vulture, lammergeyer or oribi) are seen, please notify the Office promptly so that the KZNWildlife specialists can be kept informed.

OPEN FIRES are not permitted anywhere.

A very special concession is made for the Base Camp catering team and for our evening campfires within a screened enclosure. Both are strictly controlled.

APPENDIX

Venues of July Camps since 2006

2006	Cathedral Peak, Research Catchments VI and VII, Masongwana
2007	Royal Natal National Park, Sungabala
2008	Duart Castle
2009	Giant's Castle, Chimney Pot (Maqomfa, 1894m)
2010	Crystal Waters (private farm)
2011	Injisuthi Campsite
2012	Cobham
2013	Wonder Valley (private farm)
2014	Vergelegen
2015	Highmoor
2016	Lotheni
2017	Cathedral Peak
2018	Crystal Waters (private farm)
2019	JULY CAMP CENTENARY Cobham Campsite
2020	Covid
2021	Covid
2022	Injisuthi Campsite
2023	Monk's Cowl Campsite



Gerhard Venter