

Cumberland Hike: 28th March 2021

Cumberland Nature Reserve outside Pietermaritzburg, throws us different experiences every time we go there. Now that the reserve is closed to the public, we jump at every opportunity that being a member of the Midlands Hiking Club offers us to gain access into this beautiful 560 hectares of wilderness.



Rob Melis, our seasoned hike leader, had we thought somewhat jokingly, named this hike “River Walk in Search of the Crocodile”! We met at the beautifully shaded picnic spot and ambled off, across the savanna as always mesmerized by the imposing granite cliffs. This time we headed off up a short incline and through some grassland, where we spotted a lone blesbuck enjoying an early morning graze.



We headed down towards the Umgeni River that provides the natural boundary to the reserve stopping to engage with a butterfly that was in no hurry to fly off rewarding us with some gorgeous photo opportunities.



As we came towards the end of our descent we could see the river in front of us, with a natural bend and a cottage that looked right at home. This was our pit stop for tea. Our seasoned Cumberland leader, knew that we had forgotten his promise of a crocodile hunt, and as we all stood and absorbed the tranquility, a rather large reptilian sun basker was pointed out to us. About fifty meters upstream from where we were standing! Without a doubt we were all amazed yet unfazed by the proximity of the not so elusive crocodile and spent time quietly watching and taking pictures.



The scene was set by the arrival of a magnificent fish eagle that perched itself in the tree above the crocodile, and so there was nature's magnificent triangle humans, crocodile and fish eagle. We did indeed linger longer at this tea break!



From here we set up through some woodland and back onto the top of the ridge. A tower (yes the collective name) of giraffes quietly carried on grazing as we stood for a while absorbing their grace, and then we walked back along the top of the cliffs to our starting point and a picnic.



It was not a long hike, about 6.5km in total, but it was an immersion into nature, and the convivial group lingered even longer over a leisurely lunch. So next time Cumberland pops onto the fixture list, be sure to book early and see what nature can offer up to soothe our souls.