Hike Leader - Brian Henwood

The Giba Gorge Nature Reserve is situated south of Hillcrest within the boundaries of the St Helier community. Saturday 8 July 2023 turned out to be the perfect day for our outdoor activity. This being beautiful warm weather preceding the arrival of the cold front bringing with it snow falls along the Drakensberg Mountain range.

Instead of entering the Nature Reserve at the St Helier Road gate our group of 9 headed off in a westerly direction along a grass path popular amongst the local mountain bikers. We passed the golf driving range and the Cliffton Canyon 4x4 track on our left before heading up to the first view site overlooking the N3 and the spectacular McIntosh Falls. These falls are on the upper reaches of the Mhlatuzana river.

The descent to the Mhlatuzana Viaduct on the N3 was down a steep grassy slope made easier by the zigzags on sections of the path. The group rested in the shade of the enormous viaduct enjoying a most welcome cooldrink break. This while the leader explained the methodology adopted during the construction phase of this amazing example of civil engineering excellence.

Having passed under the viaduct we proceeded to enter the Giba Gorge Bike Park where there are wide footpaths for hikers and numerous trails for mountain bikers. The gentle descent to Café Umfula was along a 2 to 3m wide trail path and on arrival we crossed the river and settled down for a most welcome lunchtime snack and comfort break.

The ascent to the N2 Underpass was somewhat steep but then the gentler walk through the Giba Gorge Nature Reserve was simply awesome. Beautiful indigenous forest with a variety of birdlife. Unfortunately, the gravel road had suffered considerable damage in places due to the recent heavy rains.

Including the lunch break the 14 km hike had taken us four and a half hours. Despite the weary legs the general feeling was that the hike was most enjoyable and worthy of more frequent visits.