

# MIDLANDS HIKING CLUB – HIKING REPORT

## Sungubala Eco Camp, Northern Drakensberg – April 2024



Sungubala Eco Camp Rondavels



Canibal Cavern in the distance



Brian, Jen, Kurt, Phil, Karen, Mieke and Rhona off to the grotto with the Cavern Berg Resort in the background



**Hike Leader**  
Brian Henwood

**Day 1: Cavern** - For much of our group, comprising Kurt and Jen, Rhona and Phil, Mark and Mieke, Karen and Michelle this was to be their first trip to Sungubala Eco Camp. This self-catering establishment for nature lovers is in the valley adjoining the Cavern Berg Resort. Although powered by wind and solar, gas is used for cooking and water-heating to ensure reliability.

The afternoon was sunny and cool with a scattering of clouds which made conditions ideal for our orientation 'walkabout'. We chose the contour path that took us through grassy slopes and scattered protea bushes, into the Fern Forest. Having crossed the wooden bridge, we entered the beautifully manicured gardens of the hotel.

This 5 km scenic route via Bushbuck Ridge and the Fern Forest was a gentle start to our 5-day visit to the northern Drakensberg.

**Day 2: Cannibal Cavern** - The spectacular sunrise and clear skies with a predicted 24<sup>o</sup> max gave us the perfect opportunity to tackle a long hike.

The 12 km route to Cannibal Cavern included a rest at Jim's Cave, lunchbreak at the Cavern, and a visit to the 'bushman paintings' at Lone Rock. We returned through the Fern Forest and over Bushbuck Ridge where we had our first sightings of eland and mountain reedbeek.

**Day 3: Grotto** - The weather prediction of clear skies and 31<sup>o</sup> max, made the Grotto hike an attractive option. This is along a 9,5 km route starting with a walk down the driveway to the Natural Pool. This is a series of large rock pools in a recreational park. The route then crosses the road, climbs up to Fan Falls on First Ridge and then drops down into the Grotto. This is a scenic spot in the gorge at a junction of two rivers. The two waterfalls make it somewhat special.



Site of Bushman Paintings



On the move again



The magnificent Echo Cave

**Day 4: Bishop's Inkaba** - After two days of hiking in the area southwest of Sungubala, it was time to explore the upper northern area. This 6 km circular route took us up to a large rock outcrop known as Bishop's Inkaba. Inkaba being the zulu word for 'belly button' or naval. Having reached this point we were able to rest at a waterfall and admire the beautiful pool below.

We then entered a wet indigenous forest and crossed a strong stream frequented by local animals. The contour path then crossed grasslands where we saw a group of eland and mountain reedbuck grazing in the shade of the mountain. After emerging from the second forest, we started the descent to Jackal Hill.

The path lead us to a river where there are pools and a rock carving in sandstone known as the Silent Woman. This is a short distance from Sungubala Camp.

**Day 5: Echo Cave** - By the kind permission of management we were permitted to vacate our rooms at midday.

This gave us the opportunity to climb up to Echo Cave, which is a 3 to 4 hr moderately steep route to a rock overhang above a forested area. The hike may be 3 hours, but an additional hour is desirable in order to appreciate the stunningly beautiful striped rockface and 100m high waterfall.

The tall black and white stripes caused by water seepage from the rock are a unique feature. What a wonderful way to end a long weekend in the majestic Drakensberg mountains. We will be back soon!

