

Garden Castle, Rhino' 16.06.2025

Hike leader: Dusty Shaw
Photos from various hikers
Hikers: 10
Max Elevation: 2668m
Severity: 4+

Weather: Clear skies and snow on the Drakensberg
Total Accent: 927m
Distance: 16km
Route: There and back



Map



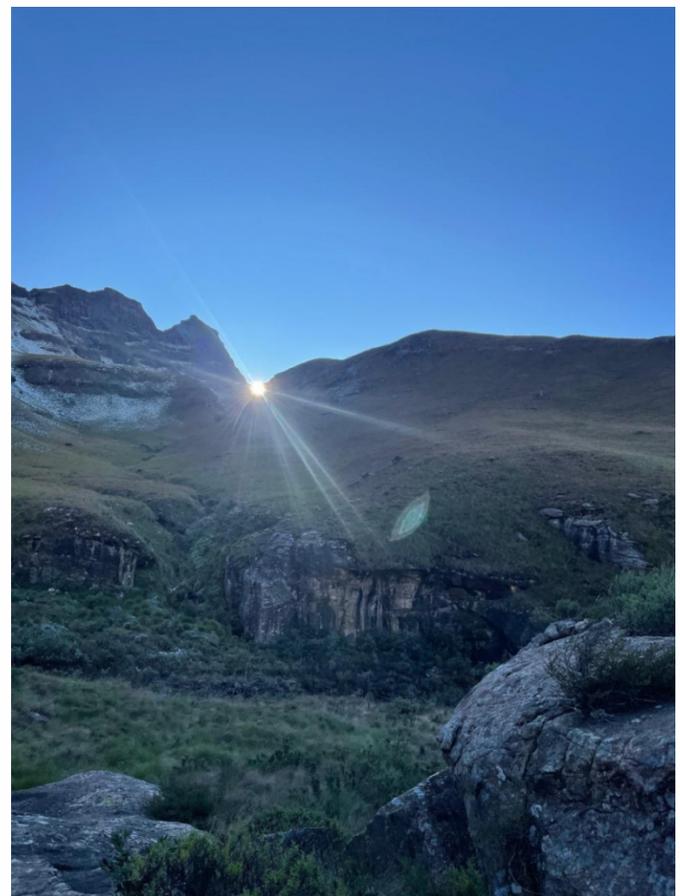
Mashai Pass

The build up of the hike to Rhino Peak plus the added snow conditions proved too much for some and early cancellations followed. This meant that some on the waiting list had an opportunity to fill the openings, lucky for them. At the appointed time 5:30am we donned our packs, head lights on and moved in the direction of the Rhino, grass crunching underfoot from the frost. The first 4km we tried to maintain a fast pace to get to pillar cave as this section was to be the least effort. Once pillar cave was reached we

had a short break to strip layers off and have a quick cup of coffee as the sun started to make an appearance.



Packs back on again we headed off into the shadow of the Rhino feeling the chill whenever we had to stop for a quick breather, the trick here was to keep moving at a steady pace as waiting for tail enders meant the front runners were freezing up as the ice cold wind blew down the pass. As the sun climbed higher a silver shine and then a brilliant light of the sun edged through a gap in the mountain.



A little bit further on we came across the stone proclaiming UMzimkhulu Wilderness which was established in 1979.



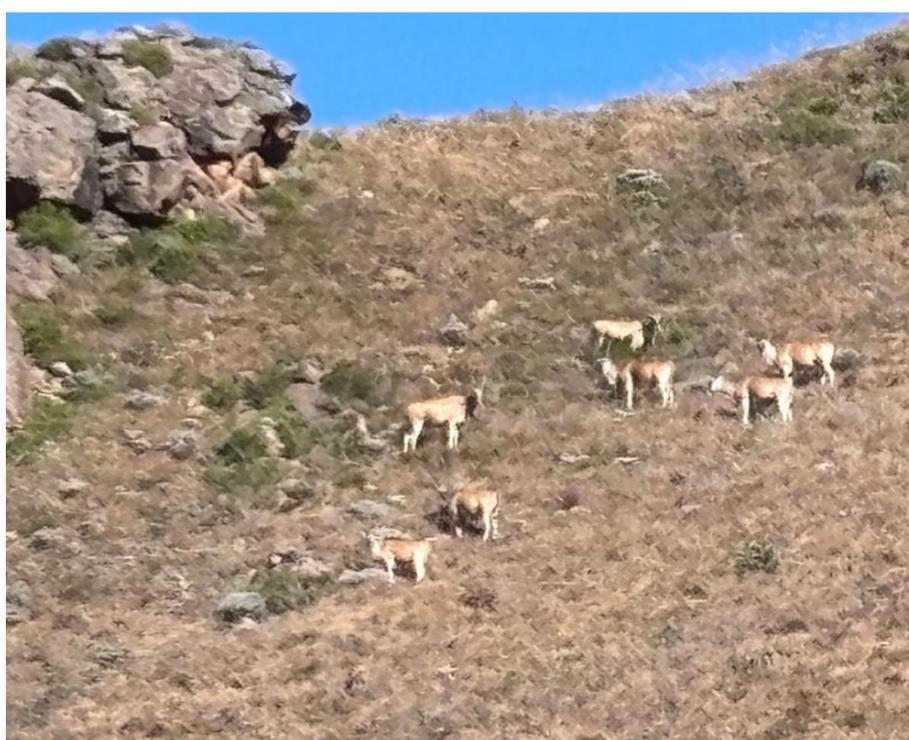
Another short break was held where there was a bit of sun to warm up a bit more whilst looking at what was still to come.



As the snow noticeably started to get thicker, some of the party members opted not to continue further and rather waited to see how far the forerunners would get before they would turn around. The five remaining hikers opted to push on till 11:00 or get to the start of Mashai pass. Leaving the remaining party behind to build a snowman, we continued on as the snow became more treacherous, slippery and not being able to see the path any longer and having to rely on a GPS track that was downloaded earlier on in the week, we managed to stay on track.



After a stream crossing and up a short wooden step ladder we came upon our first bit of snow and the annex cave which also has a pillar holding the roof up.



Some Eland were spotted near pillar cave that were wondering what these humans were up to now.



As we made our way closer to the start of the pass, the snow became thicker to the point where we had to step very cautiously as to not fall into any deep holes.



It was slow going but we managed to reach both the time and the goal where we wanted to turn around.

Luckily we still had comms on WhatsApp and sent a message down to the group to continue back to pillar cave where we would try and meet up with them later as we made our way down. Going down was just as slow as going up through the snow as our footsteps that we were now following back had been compacted and formed ice inside and became slippery. Also, the track would disappear totally showing that no one had ever passed here an hour ago. In the meantime the other group were sunning themselves whenever they got a chance on their way to Swimans hut.



That evening around the table whilst having supper, the war stories came out on lessons learnt and how to be better prepared for the next encounter with the mighty Rhino.

Quote of the day: **"It's not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves."** – Sir Edmund Hillary

The real challenge in hiking (and in life) isn't just the terrain—it's our mindset. Overcoming self-doubt and pushing our limits is what makes the journey meaningful.