



P I L L A R C A V E

Pillar Cave Hike, Garden Castle.

Leader: Deon

Date: 14 to 15 February 2026

Distance: 9,88km

Weather: Cloudy and cool becoming misty and rainy becoming very cold.

Number of hikers: 9

Severity of hike: A moderate to easy hike with 2 river crossings.

Report by: Deon

Garden Castle is a section of the Drakensberg that we do not visit much, unless we do the Giants Cup, and it was time for us to visit one of the caves in the area to rectify this short coming. The plan was set in motion and soon our hiking day dawned on us. Some of the group decided to arrive the day before, and due to the weather not looking too great, we decided to stay over in Swaiman's hut for the night. The afternoon and evening brought the promise of great weather, however this was short lived.

Early morning we could hear the rain outside, and by the time we all arose, the clouds were still heavy and the mountains were covered with a white blanket. We were ready and started to make our way down to the main office where we were all set to meet. After sorting out payment and filling in the mountain register we all set off. The rain stayed away and the cool air made for perfect hiking weather and soon we were looking up the valley. The up hills were not too strenuous but our pace was slow as we all had to warm the legs up again.

Mayalee, who must be the youngest club hiker, was going at a good pace and was full of excitement on joining us again on an overnight hike to sleep in a cave. The up hills were a little bit challenging for her, as the wet conditions made the path wet and slippery and we all had to be careful not to slip or injure ourselves.

The Mlambonja River was flowing strongly and we could see and hear the rushing water well before we saw it. At the first crossing, the river was high, but a few rocks were sticking out of the water and we all managed to get through without getting too wet. The walk to the second crossing was a wet affair as the misty rain now started to come down a bit more and we were all damp and cold, but still in high spirits.

We made it to the last steep up hill to reach the cave, by now we were all cold and wet, ready to put our bags down and rest.

The cave was spacious, unfortunately due to all the drips, the sleeping areas were few and far between and after a bit of shuffling, we all found a little space to sleep. Soon the sleeping bags were out and a few were crawling into their beds to warm up while the stoves were lit and cups of tea and coffee were brewed. We all enjoyed our lunch and drinks while looking out over the valley, with mist obscuring the view and then lifting just enough to give us hope that we could go exploring. Unfortunately, the weather did not improve and we were cave bound for the rest of the afternoon well into the evening. Luckily for us, we had a strong drip right in front of the cave and we did not have to go far for our water. A very brave Beth, even had a wash under the drip to freshen up a bit!

Soon it was supper time, the stoves came out and the smells of supper filled the cave, and with our tummies full it was almost time for bed. Soon everyone started to climb into their cozy sleeping bags, some still enjoying their last cup of hot chocolate, however soon a silence fell over the cave. The far-off rushing water and drips drowned out all the noise and soon everyone was dreaming of moody, misty, mountains.

The morning dawned cold and wet, it must have rained a bit during the night as we could hear the rushing of the water as if the river was right next to us. Breakfast and coffee were the order of the day and in between we all started to pack up. A bitter sweet feeling filled the cave, excited to go home, at the same time a feeling of regret that we have to leave this beauty behind.

By the time we left, the rain had stopped, and the mist was fighting a battle against the sun, and every now and again we could see the blue breaking through. The rivers were full and it was a treacherous time for us all. With the prospect of warm showers, we were not too worried about getting our feet wet and we all took the plunge and just went for it. There were a few tense moments with an almost unplanned swim, luckily not and no hikers were made to swim.

Soon the camp came into sight and as we walked and we knew that our time in the mountains was almost up. After a quick shower, we all made our way to have a roast lunch at B's Bistro, a welcome and delicious meal and a great way to close off an experience for the memory banks.