

Mount Perazim

8-10 May 2026



Report by Candice Piek

17 enthusiastic hikers converged on St Fort Farm, just outside of Clarens in the Free State, on Friday the 8th May. This was our base camp for the night and where we would begin our two-day, roughly 16km round-trip hike in the beautiful Maluti Mountains, led by Hettie Randall and guided by Adrian Clarke from Alien Adventures.

We had a choice of two dormitories, the Melkstal or the Old School House. We chose the Melkstal, an old stone building with beautiful wooden beams and a cement floor. The accommodation was basic, with bunk beds and a few tables inside, but it had character, and that's what I loved about it. Although it was old, we had a place to charge our devices and outside at the back of the building, was the ablution block, a simple structure with four showers made from corrugated iron, four toilet stalls, and a hand basin. The water was hot, just what was needed to warm us up as there was an icy chill in the air.

As we gathered and got ourselves orientated for our two-day adventure, the braai fires were lit and Deon, our fire master made sure the coals were perfect for cooking our meat. We had all brought along salads to share, (far too much food as usual) and as we all enjoyed our sundowners we got to know each other better over the roaring braai fire.

As the fire slowly died down, we headed off to our dormitories to get ready for the night. But before we did, Deon, Jared and I took a short stroll away from the buildings to take in the beautiful night sky. Wow, it was crystal clear and filled with countless stars. I could only imagine what the sky would look like when we were out in the open and sleeping in the cave.



Day 1

We woke bright and early on Saturday morning to enjoy breakfast and pack our bags, which were to be slack-packed to the cave for us. Once the bakkie arrived, we loaded everything up and gathered around to meet our guide for the next two days, an interesting chap named Adrian. I later learned he was nicknamed "Adrian the Alien" for reasons I won't go into! He also brought along his beautiful Austrian Cattle Dog, Bella. What an absolute beauty she was. After Adrian briefed us, and once the obligatory group selfies had been taken by Peter from St Fort Farm, we set off on what would become an adventure I will never forget.

As we left the farm, the sign at the gate read "The Cannibal Trail", the former name of this hike. Later, Adrian would explain the reason behind the eerie name. As we headed off into the unknown, I felt both excited and nervous about what lay ahead. After the first steep uphill climb, we reached the top of the hill and were rewarded with incredible views of the farm and the mountains surrounding it. What a view! If this was only the beginning, what else was still to come?

Adrian explained more about the hike and what we could expect to see along the route, unusually named waterfalls, Bushman paintings, and strangely named mountains such as George's Pimple and Horeb. With Bella and Adrian leading the way, we once again set off into the mountains.

The Malutis glistened all around us as water seeped from beneath the rocks, and I quickly discovered that avoiding the black sections on the rocks was imperative, they were like ice and incredibly slippery. We traversed many of these sections as our journey took us deeper into the mountains. At times we walked along narrow single track paths, and the next moment we found ourselves scrambling up sheer rock faces. It was incredible. Sometimes we were literally walking at the base of the towering mountains beneath huge rock overhangs, never knowing what awaited us around the next corner.

Just as Adrian had promised, we could hear the sound of running water, and before long Bat Wing Waterfall appeared before us. Massive stone "wings" framed the waterfall as the water cascaded down its centre. After a quick rest and plenty of photographs, we continued onward. We climbed out of this section of the trail and entered a grassy plateau where long brown grass swayed in the breeze, almost as if it were alive. Cattle grazed peacefully nearby, completely unfazed by our presence.

As we continued, the landscape changed once again and we suddenly found ourselves standing above a ravine. Far below us lay the Ou Hout forests, waiting for our arrival. We snaked our way down into the valley below. After numerous tricky river crossings and some interesting boulder hopping, we emerged at the bottom and were immediately faced with the climb back out the other side.

While we were down in the forest, Adrian pointed out a rock formation he believed was where the "cannibals" once held their captives to fatten them up. What a frightening thought.



Onwards we went until, just as Adrian had mentioned earlier, we arrived at the rock art site. Although some of the paintings had weathered over time, several drawings were still clearly visible. Adrian went into great detail explaining what he believed they represented. Personally, I rather enjoyed his alien-inspired interpretations over the more traditional explanations. It's incredible to think that these paintings created from materials such as animal blood, earth pigments and ash have stood the test of time for hundreds of years.

Now it was time to tackle the final stretch of the day's hike. We needed to reach the cave before sunset, as hiking in the dark simply wasn't an option. I think the promise of sundowners and an incredible sunset at the cave gave us all the motivation we needed. As we walked along the mountain contour and passed through a gate, I knew we had arrived at our destination but I was not prepared for what I saw.

The cave was MASSIVE.

The overhang towered high above us and stretched deep and wide across the mountainside. Two fire pits seemed to be calling out to be lit, and before long the fire was crackling away. This was no ordinary cave. At the bottom of the hill there was even a basic ablution block with two bathrooms, each equipped with a shower, toilet and basin, as well as a small kitchen area, a welcome bit of luxury while sleeping in a cave!

Our foam mattresses were waiting for us in the kitchen area and with one final push of energy, we carried them up the hill and placed them on the ground sheets that had already been strategically laid out inside the cave. Our bags had arrived earlier in the day, allowing us to unpack, freshen up and settle in for what would become an unforgettable night beneath the overhang, overlooking the distant mountains we had walked through earlier that day.

I still cannot properly describe the sunset I witnessed that evening. The sky looked as though it was on fire. Reds, pinks and deep orange colours filled the horizon, while clouds drifting in front of the setting sun created a scene unlike anything I had ever seen before. I was genuinely moved to tears. It was simply incredible. As the hikers prepared their evening meals, some braaied while others enjoyed prepared dinners. Hettie treated us to delicious Christmas cake and even better Glühwein, what an absolute treat!

After dinner, it was time to relax and socialise around the fire. As darkness settled in, the stars slowly appeared overhead and twinkled brightly across the sky. I spent time trying to identify constellations, although Orion's Belt was probably the only one I truly recognised, my astronomy definitely needs some work!

Jared, my son and I both love stargazing, and at one point I noticed what I thought was a moving star. I later realised after perhaps one too many cups of Glühwein that it was actually the Starlink satellites crossing overhead. For a brief moment I truly believed Orion's Belt had gained a new star or 20.

As the fire slowly died down and the cold mountain air settled in around us, everyone gradually headed off to bed. After a long day on the trail, it was finally time to hunker down for the night and recharge ourselves for the following day.



Day 2

Yay, I survived the night!

I genuinely thought I was going to freeze to death, but my new sleeping bag turned out to be an absolute winner and I made it through the night perfectly fine. In fact, I was actually warm! The extra blanket and pillow I brought along probably helped too. I think most of us slept reasonably well too judging by all the snoring echoing around the cave.

As the hikers slowly arose along with the sun, everyone began preparing breakfast. There's always something satisfying about enjoying a solid meal before setting off on a hike. The cave quickly became a hive of activity as sleeping gear was packed away and bags were prepared for their journey back to base camp. At 8am Adrian gathered us for a quick briefing on our journey home, and before long we were once again on the trail, leaving behind the now-empty cave for the next group of adventurous hikers to enjoy.

We slowly snaked our way up the mountainside and eventually emerged onto the plateau of a massive mountain. The views stretched for miles in every direction thanks to the clear weather and although dark clouds were beginning to gather there was a definite chill in the air. The sun disappeared behind thick grey clouds that looked ready to burst at any moment. Luckily, only a few light drops of rain fell and we were able to continue onward without much trouble. As always, Adrian entertained us with fascinating stories and facts about the surrounding mountains and how they had received their unusual names, George's Pimple being one of them.

The journey home initially felt easier than the previous day, but that illusion quickly disappeared once we had to descend back down the mountain. We navigated some incredibly steep and slippery sections, followed by tricky rocky paths all the way down to the valley below, while baboons called out to each other in the distance. After a quick stop alongside a flowing river lined with willow trees, we enjoyed a much-needed tea break and replenished ourselves for the final stretch home. Thanks to all the recent rain, the farm roads were filled with enormous puddles and overflowing streams, making for some entertaining river crossings along the way. Thankfully everyone made it across safely, although a few wet boots were unavoidable. We continued along the farm road for a short distance and before I knew it, Mushroom Rock was looming in front of me.

Suddenly it hit me, we had reached the end of the hike.

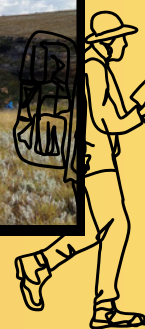


Just like that, we were back to reality.

A real sense of accomplishment came over me, and I'm sure many of the others felt the same. This was certainly not a hike for the faint-hearted. I was incredibly impressed with my fellow hikers, everyone did amazingly well. After wrapping up a few final bits of admin, some of us freshened up and enjoyed lunch back at base camp. Sadly, it wasn't long before it was time to say our farewells. Some hikers still had very long journeys home ahead of them, and soon we were all wishing one another safe travels until we meet up again on the next hike.

This is a hike that will remain firmly stored in my memory bank forever.

What made it even more special for me was sharing the experience with my son, Jared, memories that will truly last a lifetime.





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