



cands_thehappyrambler

Aloe Festival Hike

Ashburton
5 July 2026
23 Hikers



cands_thehappyrambler

The Lower Mpushini Valley Conservancy (LMVC) is approximately 3000 ha of which 665 ha is a formally proclaimed Biodiversity Stewardship Nature Reserve, the Mpushini Protected Environment. The first such community protected area to be proclaimed in KZN under the then pilot SA biodiversity stewardship program in 2011.

On a very crisp Sunday 2 degree morning , we met huddled deeply into down jackets at Galago Farm. A promise of a warmer day to come in the deep blue sky and stillness in the air.

The Festival was set up around us, stalls and stands, the smell of coffee strong in the air. We were all filled with anticipation.

What stood out the most for me was a display by the anti-poaching Snare Aware group of recovered snares and an array of skeleton skulls. The thickness and crudeness of the wire snares was a shocker. Being in this place supporting this very role and hopefully reducing the suffering, made the morning ahead more poignant.



cands_thehappyrambler

We started with a lovely river walk (the Mpushini Riverine Trail) to whet the appetite. *Acacia natalitia* or Sweetthorn (formerly called *Acacia karroo*) and pioneer species *Acacia nilotica* or Applethorn, were scattered here and there along the bank. A little history was shared on how this vital water source had been rejuvenated from alien trees and weeds from a barren bed to a healthy flowing stream, despite the arid conditions.

We then made our way up into the thornveld proper, a bushwalk for the lack of a better description! Following the orange ribbon markers leading us along Tuffy's Trail, Millie Mongoose Trail , iPithi's Trail ...



The Aloe Candelabrum standing tall and majestic along the paths, a testimony to time, some 10m high. Their inflorescence high and proud catching the sun on their deep orange/red racemes. We were at times flanked by these beauties as the path wound through the traditional African flattop, Acacia tortillas, Acacia Robusta greening up in July when everything else is dry and the Acacia ataxacantha or Wag 'n bietjie thorn trees that catch you and won't let go.

Other trees dotted through this wild bushveld thicket are the Cusdonia spicata or cabbage tree, the first to colonize the termitaria (which along with water have been the main shapers of the landforms), Gymnosporia heterophylla the angular stemmed Spike thorn and Ehretia rigida the puzzlebush. To also mention a couple of the broadleaf varieties, Spiritachys africana or Tamboti grow behind dolerite dykes along contour lines in the landscape, Scotia brachypetala or weeping boerbean which are slow growing giants for this area along the trail and flower every 7 years...

We then walked up to Mawingo Farm and explored their donga, a cool ravine where the Haemanthus albiflos (white or dappled paintbrush) and Streptocarpus (Cape primrose) grow free! A totally different feel in this depression, a cool damp place with the water table pushing through as if to start a new river.



We finally walked up to Impala Bend for lunch. We were greeted by a massive clump of Aloe arborescens (Krantz aloe) in full bloom with Aloe candelabrum lining the driveway like sentinels. But we were not prepared for the spectacular landscaped terraces that opened out beyond the entrance, with an endless view over the valley, it was quite breathtaking. A perfect lunch spot.

And so it was that we reluctantly walked back to our cars. A visual overload!

Report by : Hettie

Bib Ref: Pandora (Schep) Long

