

Blinkwater Hike

Newhanover : 27.06.2026

Hike leader: Dusty Shaw

Weather: Clear

Hikers: 10

Total Accent: 467m

Total distance: 12km

Severity: 3

Report: Dusty Shaw

Photos: Various photographers

Click here to view: [YouTube](#)



1,000.0
Our group met at the designated meeting point on the P550 before making our way, at a leisurely pace through the dust, to the Douglas Smith Cottage. After preparing our gear, we were ready to begin what promised to be an exciting day exploring the beautiful Blinkwater Mountain Reserve.

The reserve is jointly managed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, SAPPI, and Mondi, ensuring the protection and conservation of this unique landscape. Following a brief introduction and a fascinating overview of the reserve's history, we decided to tackle the route in reverse rather than following the traditional approach through the magnificent avenue of London Plane trees.

With Melanie taking up her role as sweep at the rear of the group, Graham and I led from the front, clearing the occasional Mauritian thorn vine that had already begun reclaiming sections of the recently maintained trail. Nature wastes little time in taking back what is hers, and in places the growing grass had already started to obscure the path. Nevertheless, our progress was steady as we ventured deeper into the reserve.

Our first stop was the old stone kraal. The impressive dry-stone walls, constructed without a single trace of mortar, once again left everyone marvelling at the craftsmanship and ingenuity of those who built them many years ago.





From there we followed a plantation road beneath towering eucalyptus trees before branching onto the old rail track, where we crossed the first of several crystal-clear streams. As we ventured further into the indigenous forest, another stream crossing demanded careful footing over the slippery, uneven rocks.

The climb through the forest began gently before gradually becoming steeper as we approached the dramatic sandstone cliffs. Our first glimpse of these towering rock faces revealed the spectacular Arch, beneath which an underground river could be heard rumbling through the rock, even though it remained hidden from view.



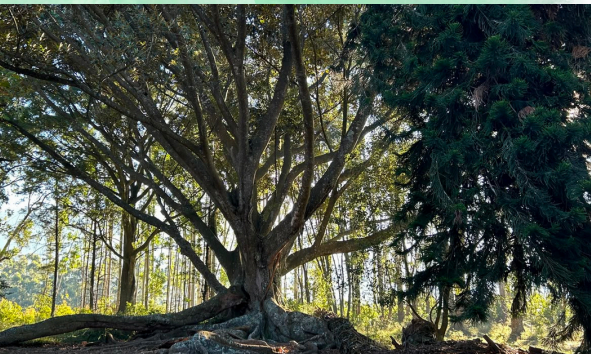
A short distance further, we encountered one of the reserve's most remarkable features—a magnificent curtain of strangler vines stretching up the sheer rock face, clinging to the trees high above. Graham and I couldn't resist testing our climbing skills while the ladies below provided plenty of encouragement and laughter.

Continuing upwards, we soon emerged from the cool shade of the indigenous forest and began the final ascent. The zigzagging path wound its way through shoulder-high thatching grass, but fortunately remained clear enough to guide us safely to the summit.



At the top, we found a sheltered rocky outcrop out of the wind where we enjoyed a well-earned lunch while soaking in the breathtaking panoramic views under clear blue skies.

After a relaxing break, we set off on the final leg of the hike across the rolling grasslands. In the distance we could clearly make out Albert Falls Dam. Recently burned tracer belts marked preparations for the rotational controlled burns carried out by Ezemvelo every second year, an important management practice that reduces fuel loads while helping to prevent soil erosion caused by excessive burning.



With the afternoon sun warming our backs and a cool north-westerly breeze blowing gently towards us, the walk back was both comfortable and enjoyable. Our route eventually led us through the magnificent avenue of century-old London Plane trees before returning to Douglas Smith Cottage, bringing to a close another memorable day of hiking, spectacular scenery, good company, and an appreciation for one of KwaZulu-Natal's hidden natural treasures.



LAST WORDS: "FROM HIDDEN RIVERS TO OPEN HORIZONS, BLINKWATER IS A JOURNEY WORTH EVERY STEP."

