

Vanessa Taylor



Deon Small



Dawn Norton



Tracy van Vugt



Mahai Camp May 22-24

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Sthabiso Chiliza



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Mahai Campout RNNP

LEADER: DEON SMALL

DATE: 22-24 MAY 2026

DISTANCE: 27,8 KM

WEATHER: WARM AND SUNNY BECOMING PARTLY CLOUDY BUT NO RAIN.

NUMBER OF HIKERS: 13

SEVERITY OF HIKE: A MODERATE HIKE.

REPORT BY: DEON



The trip was postponed from December 2025 to May this year and the change was well worth it. The weather was a lot more stable and drier than the summer months, however the weeks leading up to the hike was some of the worst weather we had this year. Unfortunately the weather is always an unknown and the decision was made that no matter what, we will be camping and take it as it comes. As it turned out, we could not have asked for better weather, no wind, no rain and a bit of cloud to help cool things down a bit.

The group decided that they all needed time away from the pressures of work, and we all met at Mahai Campsite on Friday afternoon. On arrival at Mahai, there were hundreds of campers already pitched, but there was more than enough space for us to put our tents up for the weekend. Camp was soon all set up and we chilled around the bush TV, catching up on all the news from around KZN. We enjoyed the sunset and coffee, and soon the fire was ready and supper was on the go. Some of our team members arrived a bit later but we all gathered around the communal fire enjoying our supper. Supper was from pre-cooked meals to gourmet bush ... or should I say Berg burgers, with all the trimmings. The night air was cold and we decided to have a hot shower just before bed, and hopefully that would help us sleep warmer.

Saturday dawned on us, clear and crisp, still no frost and wind. The sun was beginning to rise, colouring the cliffs behind us a bright pink, and soon we were enjoying our breakfast in the warm sun. The plan was to all meet up at the Tugela Gorge car park, where we will set off from. The walk is not particularly difficult but it does get a bit long in the afternoon so we decided to start as early as possible. The blue sky gave way to an overcast sky, giving us some reprieve from the harsh sun burning down on us.

The water level of the Tugela River was low and as we got a view of the river, we could sometimes just see a thin silver of water in between the rocks. The forest sections were magical, cool and refreshing to the soul.

We reached the last section at the plaque, and from here we needed to cross the river a few times before reaching the tunnel section. The trail was actually quite busy with a number of hikers visiting the area and we all had to share the space with each other. Mea and Paten decided that it would be a good time to try the icy cold water, and explore the tunnel section. We all enjoyed our lunch in between the rocks, before making our way back down to the car park. The weather seemed to change a bit for the worse, however we were lucky and the weather behaved. On our way tragedy struck as Rob slipped at the river crossing, and had a full dunk into the freezing water, luckily no damage done. After a quick dry off and change of clothes we steadily made our way to the vehicles.

Back at camp we all gathered like a flock of red-wing starlings, chattering away, about all the sights and sounds we experienced during the day, while we started to prepare supper. Kevin and I soon had the fires burning bright and we all congregated around it to soak up as much heat as we could. One thing about the mountains is that when the sun starts to set, the temperature does the same and starts to dip very quickly. We all sat around the fire and every now and again a group would peel away, making their way back to their tents, and soon it was 20:00 and the last die-hards decided to call it a day.

For the Sunday walk, I planned an easy walk to Gudu Bush, that is now "easy" if you don't take the climb up to Lookout Rock into account. Saturday we were blessed with seeing a number of majestic Eland and today we were treated to the same. Unfortunately, their numbers seem to fluctuate quite a bit and we were actually lucky to see so many in the two days.

Gudu Bush was an amazing experience of beauty the Drakensberg can offer, and we sat in its shade and enjoyed our last mountain lunch before we had to make our way back down to Mahai.

The weekend campout was a great success, mixing intense walks with easy, and views and experiences that had great value. The weather was ideal with no rain, no hurricane winds and cool conditions for when we needed it, and yes it was cold at night, but we survived. Will we do this again? Bet you we will, and watch out for this on next year's fixtures, and mark it down in your diary as this is a campout weekend that rejuvenates and restores the soul, body and mind like no other.

