

Bulwer Mountain

23 August 2026

Report by Candice Piek

Sunday morning saw 11 enthusiastic hikers gather bright and early to take on Bulwer Mountain, also known as Mahwaqa Mountain, for the third hike in the Midlands Hiking Club Big Four Challenge.

After arriving at Mountain Park Hotel, we gathered ourselves and got ready for the challenge ahead. Brian gave us our hike briefing before we were joined by our guide, Jack Molefe from Mahwaqa Hiking Club. A little further into the hike, we were joined by Vuyo, also from Mahwaqa Hiking Club and local community member, Mr Madiba.

Of course, no hike gets underway without the obligatory pre-hike group photo, so once the evidence was captured, we set off.

THE CLIMB BEGINS

The morning couldn't have been better for hiking. There was a slight chill in the air, but the sun was shining and the skies were beautifully clear. As we started walking, we got our first proper glimpse of the impressive mountain we were about to tackle.

Jack had warned us that this would be a "go and stop" hike, and he wasn't joking! We would climb, stop to catch our breath and take in the surroundings, then climb some more. The first section took us steadily upwards, and before long we were tackling a very steep slope.

The frequent stops actually gave us plenty of opportunities to look around and appreciate the changing scenery as we climbed higher.



ROCK ART ALONG THE WAY

Partway up the mountain, we took a slight detour to explore some of the caves where we were able to see ancient rock art.

This was a particularly special part of the hike. Standing inside the cave and seeing the paintings in their natural surroundings gave us a wonderful connection to the people who travelled through and lived in this landscape long before us.

After exploring the rock art, we returned to the route and continued our climb.

A CHANGE OF PACE

As we approached the higher sections of the mountain, we took another short break to gather ourselves before continuing.

From here, the character of the hike changed. We moved onto a lovely contour path that took us around the back of the mountain. Unfortunately, the haze meant that the Drakensberg wasn't clearly visible on the day, although we were told that there were still remnants of the recent snow on the higher peaks.

Jack also told us about a tarn that could be seen from higher up on the mountain. A tarn is a natural mountain lake or pool formed without human intervention, rather than a man-made dam.

Naturally, we had to go and have a look!

We took another small detour across the rocky upper section of the mountain, and there it was, clearly visible down in the valley below. It was a beautiful viewpoint, and we stopped to take photographs and enjoy the scene.

We weren't the only ones enjoying the view. In the distance we could hear baboons calling, and Jack's sharp eyes soon spotted one sitting right on top of the hill on the opposite side of the tarn, keeping a watchful eye on us.



THE FINAL PUSH TO THE SUMMIT

From the tarn viewpoint, it was time for the final trek towards the summit and the beacon.

By this stage the wind had picked up and there was a definite chill in the air. The higher we climbed, the more noticeable the wind became, and jackets were quickly coming out of backpacks.

Eventually, after plenty of climbing, stopping, breathing and climbing again, we reached the summit.

Mahwaqa rises to approximately 2,072 metres above sea level, making this a serious mountain challenge and a very satisfying summit to reach.

We were more than ready for our 30-minute lunch break.

Sitting at the top, we could finally relax and take in the views across the valley below. The landscape was a wonderful mix of rolling grasslands, dusty roads and scattered homes, and we even spotted a local rider making their way along the road on horseback.

And, of course, we had to gather around the beacon for the official summit photograph, our proof that Mahwaqa Mountain had been conquered!

DOWN THE OTHER SIDE

With lunch finished and the summit officially ticked off, it was time to start our descent.

The first section down was steep, requiring a little concentration as we made our way carefully downhill. The vegetation on this side of the mountain was also noticeably different, with beautiful forested areas in the distance contrasting with the brown winter grasslands.

The winter colours really stood out here. The burnt brown grass, fresh green growth and darker green forests created a beautiful patchwork across the landscape.

We eventually reached the flatter section of the mountain where the Bulwer paragliding launch area is situated. Mahwaqa Mountain is well known as a paragliding and hang-gliding site.

Unfortunately, there were no paragliders taking advantage of the conditions on Sunday, so we continued on our way, following the contour path as we gradually made our descent.



BACK TO MOUNTAIN PARK HOTEL

After a long and rewarding day on the mountain, we eventually made our way back to Mountain Park Hotel, where a wonderful surprise was waiting for us.

The lovely Sam had prepared tea, scones, fresh cream and jam for the returning hikers. After the challenge of Mahwaqa, there couldn't have been a more welcome sight!

There was plenty of celebrating as everyone arrived back safely, tired but happy, and most importantly, everyone successfully completed the hike.

That means number three of the Midlands Hiking Club Big Four Challenge is officially ticked off!

A huge thank you to Brian for organising the hike, and to Jack Molefe and Vuyo from Mahwaqa Hiking Club for guiding and supporting us along the way.

Thank you also to Sam and Roelf from Mountain Park Hotel, and Mr. Madiba, for joining us and adding to a fantastic day.

Mahwaqa was certainly a challenge, but with perfect hiking weather, wonderful company, fascinating rock art, beautiful scenery and a very satisfying summit, it was a day we won't forget in a hurry.

Three down. One to go!

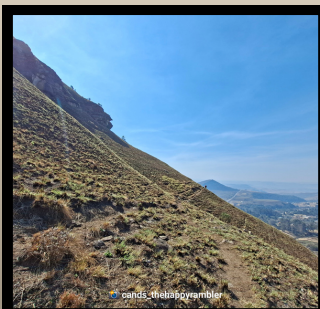




Rebecca



Mehmood



Dawn



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