



## DECEMBER 2021 NEWSLETTER



Mountain rescue on the slopes of Cathedral Peak, 11 December 2021. Picture by **Gustav Greffarth** – Itchyfeet SA.

### Introduction from the Editor

The threshold of a new year often inspires us to try new things. And with those new endeavours come new adventures—as evidenced by this month’s content.

High-altitude mountaineer John Black shares his K2 plans with us on page 3—an amazing feat in the making, and one we’ll be keeping a close watch on. Our climbers from Joburg take on Rhino Peak on page 6, and a trail runner slows down to look at the flowers (and see what Instagram is all about) on page 9. The local Girl Guides take their first swing at camping out and rock climbing on page 12, and on page 13 we meet our new member from Mpumalanga.

Let’s head in.

~ Karen Runge

### UPCOMING MEETS:

#### JANUARY

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup> - Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup>**

Rescue Heli Training

*Dragon Peak*

*Carl Dreyer*

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup>**

Rock Climbing

*Dragon Peak*

*Simon Vickers*

#### FEBRUARY

**Friday 4<sup>th</sup>**

Night Nunus with Nick Evans

*Palmiet Nature Reserve*

*Karen Miller*

**Friday 18<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 20<sup>th</sup>**

Cambalala House Work Meet

*Cambalala*

*Clem Robins*

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup>**

Rock Climbing

*TBA*

*Graeme Bruschi*

*(Kindly refer to the latest Meet Sheet for more information on all upcoming meets and club events.)*

## From Under the President's Desk

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Dear Members,

So how about that rain? Did December have a single dry day? I certainly don't remember one. All that extra water must have made for some interesting river crossings, for those who've been out hiking recently.

Unfortunately membership numbers are down into the 290s, due to a number of people being struck off for non-payment of subs. This is part of the natural ebb and flow of our membership—but it isn't ever nice dropping into the 200s.

While we lose some members, though, sometimes we save others—literally. On 1 December, our rescue team was called out to Cathedral Peak to aid a hiker with an injured leg, stuck stranded between the first and second scramble on the standard hiking route.

In a follow-up to the expedition news mentioned last month, our expedition fund has awarded John Black R20,000 towards his attempt on K2. He will be joined by fellow KZN member Warren Eva, and by two Joburg Section members. We (KZN) and Joburg have jointly supported this expedition's appeal to the national body's expedition fund for further support. As they say in the news media: *"This is a developing story... stay tuned for more."*

Well, time to get to the rest of the newsletter. All the best for the New Year, and remember to ditch the road and take the trails once in a while.



Carl Dreyer

**President**

**KZN Section, MCSA**



# SOUTH AFRICAN K2 2022 EXPEDITION:

## *An Interview with John Black*

*KZN's high-altitude mountaineer John Black and his team mates (fellow MCSA members Warren Eva, Robby Kojetin and Allan Dickinson) are heading out in mid-June for eight weeks of hard climbing, to be the first South African expedition to conquer K2. Karen Runge nabbed him for a preliminary interview to talk the background and basics of this amazing challenge.*



**KAREN RUNGE (KR):** How did you get into mountaineering?

**JOHN BLACK (JB):** My enjoyment of the outdoors started as a young boy, growing up in a family that did quite a lot of outdoor leisure activities. My love for more serious outdoor endeavours started in the Boy Scouts movement, where I was exposed to stuff like abseiling, hiking and rock climbing. One thing led to another, and by age 14 I was doing multi-day hikes in the Drakensberg. At 18, I hiked the Drakensberg Grand Traverse with a Scout friend, Michael Atkinson. The following year, myself and a few other Scout mates (Robby Kojetin, Warren Eva and later Allan Dickinson)—all MCSA members who earned their Springbok Scout Awards as teenagers—planned the “SA Scouts Three Peaks Expedition”, with the aim of climbing the three

highest peaks in Africa in one month: Ruwenzori, Kilimanjaro and Mt Kenya. As wet-behind-the-ears 20-year-olds, the expedition had mixed success—but we learned a lot. That challenge ignited my love for remote places, high mountains, and going on expeditions with mates.

**KR:** Tell us about some of your past successes.

**JB:** I climbed Everest successfully in 2009. I’ve completed the Seven Summits, climbed Kilimanjaro nine times, Mt Kenya three times, Elbrus twice, and myself and the MCSA guys mentioned above were the first South Africans to climb Ama Dablam in the Himalayas. I’ve summited Alpamayo, Quitaraju, been to the Alps, Ruwenzori, climbed Lobuche in Nepal... so, there are quite a few to mention!

**KR:** How do you train/prepare for an expedition?

**JB:** I do my utmost to maintain a high level of fitness all the time, mainly through running and strength training. Leading up to an expedition, I try to do more training specific to that trip. So for example, for Vinson and Denali, I dragged tyres. For Mt Kenya, I did a lot of long rock climbs. For our trip to K2, my focus will be on making sure I leave SA healthy, with great cardiovascular and endurance fitness. I will do more core work, leg strength work and climbing. Closer to the time, I'll also do more long day-hikes up steep routes with a heavy pack.



**KR:** What is it about K2, for you, that makes you want to conquer it? And when did you decide on this goal?

**JD:** I still have books about K2 that I purchased as a teenager. Along with Everest and Antarctica, it has captivated me since I was about 15 years old. I am both attracted to and terrified by its reputation as “the savage mountain”. I love that it’s in a country and region that I’ve never been to before—just the mention of K2, Karakorum and the Baltoro

Glacier elicits so many vivid pictures in my mind. It brings up a lot of emotions. It’s hard to explain. I also view it as an ultimate test of one’s abilities, as a high-altitude mountaineer. It’s remote, it’s high, it’s steep and it’s technical. Everything in one trip.

**KR:** What are some of your biggest concerns related to this expedition?

**JD:** Avalanche and rock fall. I have read every book I could get my hands on about K2, and I’ve made a concerted effort to learn from others’ mistakes and misfortunes. I will try to not repeat them.

**KR:** What are you most looking forward to about the trip?

**JD:** I’m excited beyond measure at the prospect of going to the ultimate high-altitude mountain, with friends who I’ve climbed with extensively. Together we can face head-on the challenges that the mountain, the location, the weather and our own shortcomings throw at us. The opportunity to disconnect from the world for almost two months and focus on something that means a lot to me is immensely alluring. I love being on a truly testing expedition, where the only two factors to consider are keeping yourself safe, and getting back. A summit would be a massive bonus. When considering things on the mountain the only questions are, one: *Will it harm me?* And two: *Does it aid or hamper my ambitions?* Nothing else is of any consequence. ▲

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*“Just the mention of K2, Karakoum and the Baltoro Glacier elicits so many vivid pictures in my mind. It brings up a lot of emotion. It’s hard to explain.”*

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*We’ll be keeping tabs on John and his team in the coming months.*

*Watch this space for updates on the expedition’s progress.*

# July Camp Needs YOU

The July Camp Sub-Committee needs new members to help prepare and run the KZN Section's annual July Camps of the future. We are looking for new recruits to share fresh ideas and contribute to making this unique event not only more memorable, but also more appealing to the tastes and interests of all Club members.

This special camp has been running for over 100 years. For the event, a base camp is set up in the mountains, with all cooking and catering taken care of—offering attendees 10 carefree days to enjoy the mountains however they like, exploring their surroundings or simply communing in the joy of wild spaces. Be it nature walks, hikes, birdwatching or bouldering, this no-limits event offers something for everyone, and anyone is welcome. Serving on the committee means sharing in an experience that is quite unlike anything else in the Section, or the MCSA—and it's fun!

New sub-committee members will need to attend 5-8 meetings before the next July Camp, with one of these taking place on-site to finalise details with the farmer/landowner or KZN Wildlife officials concerned. In addition to helping in the preparation and planning of the camp, new members will also join the advance party, where you will be on site for three days before the event starts. The advance party is responsible for loading/transporting/unloading equipment and food, establishing base camp, and organising the food tents. You will also need to be available on the first and last weekends of the 10-day July Camp, and the following Monday for dismantling and packing up, and to help return everything to Howick for storage.

Please contact me if you are interested in becoming a vibrant new part of July Camp—we are passionate about this event, and we welcome you!

WhatsApp: 082 538 5389

Phone: 033 239 2374

Rikki Abbott Wedderburn



**Andrew Pedley is a Joburg Section member. He and his family moved down in November, settling not far from Pietermaritzburg. As a mountain lover and rock climber, what better way to spend his first KZN holiday than trying something wild in the Berg? So that's what he did, and this is how that went.**



*Mashai Pass and Rhino Peak (obvious peak on the right) from Pillar Cave. The rock climbing starts where the ridge steepens, a couple hundred metres to the right of the summit.*

“

When my climbing partner, Matt Hoffman, came down from Joburg for Christmas, we decided to tackle a peak in the Berg via a technical route. We checked the guidebook, and both felt the Eastern Arete/Ridge of the Rhino looked like a good line (its hardest pitch is F3, or Grade 16-18). It's a proud peak, and given that it was mid-rainy (possibly the rainiest ever!) season, we figured it was about as hard as anything we would want to do. Neither of us had done a peak in the Berg before, other than a spot of new routing on Sentinel

Peak. When asking the KZN MCSA WhatsApp group what a 'Berg rack' is, we were swiftly reminded by Gavin Raubenheimer that it's all in the guidebook (followed quite rightly by a *You've been schooled* emoji from Trent Burnett)! The weather forecast warned of a 90-100% chance of rain, and in truth I thought it unlikely we'd get a chance to actually climb. But I looked forward to being out there anyway. The wildflowers alone are worth walking for, even if it's raining.

And so on Wednesday 22 December, we made our way to the Pillar Cave Annex, arriving at 11am. We bagged our spots in the cave early—which is a good thing, as the main Pillar Cave had about 15 people in it! Our original plan was to do the route on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, after overnighing in the cave—but the sun was still shining, so we took the weather window. We stashed our camping gear, packed what we needed for the route, and dashed up there. The steep slog up to the grassy col was easily the toughest part of the day, physically. From there, the walk up the gently rising Eastern Ridge to the first pitch took about 45 minutes.

The rock climbing section here covers just the last 100m or so, and as I started up the first pitch, storms blew in from nowhere (I guess that's what they do in the Berg). I'm not a fan of climbing wet rock in an electrical storm high on a peak, so I down-climbed. We huddled in a corner to avoid getting wet, and waited to see what the weather would do. I expect many readers know this drill. We decided that if the storm continued, we'd walk down. If it cleared, we'd go up. It cleared after a few flashes... and then a rainbow appeared, and the rain drifted eastwards. I moved into action and shot up the

route, wary of further storms rolling in from the west. The gear is pretty sparse, but it was easy ground and we coasted up quickly. We were pleased with our Berg rack—a few cams, a few nuts, long quickdraws and some very long slings. We used a single 60m trad line, which was perfect. We found some slings around blocks, which would have been lucky to hold the weight of a hamster. Lesson learnt: don't trust fixed gear in the Berg—inspect it carefully!



*Matt Hoffman enjoying the thrill of a summit and a big day out.*

We soon found the 'Berg style' of climbing: don't pull outwards on the holds, try to push down rather than pull. Weight all points of contact equally—no more than absolutely necessary. And be ready for one of them to blow! It's sort of a shuffle style, with hips in and hands palming down, much like that of the Berg lice that live behind the holds.

It took us an hour to do the climb. The last pitch on the slab was a bit wet and unsafe. One of the pegs can be jiggled by hand, and falling is not an option. Thankfully I had my rock shoes, which made it much easier. I really enjoyed the moment: wobbling on a damp F3, 8m run out, but feeling secure high up on that ridge. Doing this in boots must be a different story: respect to those guys back then.

At the summit, we took a few pics, inhaled a ham and cheese roll, then spotted the first flashes of the 3pm storm. We put foot and made it into the Mashai Pass just as the storm hit. We were very lucky it didn't catch us while on the climb, as we were under-dressed and would have been very cold, hanging around trying to abseil off. We were hammered by rain and wind on the long walk back to Pillar Cave Annex, but with our climb in the bag it was enjoyable—and knowing that dinner and our cosy, dry sleeping bags were waiting definitely helped. Soon enough we were quaffing beers in the cave, safe and warm at the end of the day. We were asleep by 7:30pm, and woke the next morning to the sound of stonechats pecking around and the roar of the river in full spate.

On this adventure, we experienced the Drakensberg at its moodiest: dark skies, waterfalls, howling winds. There were contrasting moments with bursts of sunshine, and so many wild flowers, yellow and pink, lifting the mood in this otherwise menacing but beautiful place. It was rewarding to know that while 95% of people would have written the day off, we took a few hours of okay weather and managed a great climb on a proud peak. A reminder that when you get a window of good conditions, take it! If we had waited until the next day, this would not have happened.

Our thanks to Gavin Raubenheimer. Without his excellent guidebook, I wouldn't have been as motivated to try something new. And of course, we would have been without the beta for the route—which was pretty much spot on. Next, when things get drier: the Injisuthi Triplet!" ▲

# WANTED: HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PLANT ?



*Guthriea capensis* a.k.a. "Hidden flower"

## WHAT IS IT?

- A plant that is pollinated by lizards! (and maybe mice?)
- Small, cryptic: 10cm high, up to 30 cm diameter, green
- Found high in the SA mountains: Drakensberg, Sneeuwberg, usually 1800 – 3000masl
- Flowers between December and April
- Leaves grow in spring & summer; may be absent in winter.
- Likes rocky areas, dolerite, basalt

## WHERE IS IT? Likely locations:

1. Kamberg: cliffs opposite camp?
2. Organ pipes/ Roland's cave
3. Sehlabathebe: dark loam in road cutting
4. Gateshead/ Naude's Nek
5. More Karoo sites??
6. Anywhere you see *Guthriea* plants in the 'berg...

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

If you see plants, please contact the research team with

- GPS co-ords
- Estimated number of plants
- Can we camp nearby?
- Leave cameras safely?
- Did you see any lizards or signs of mouse activity?

CONTACT Ruth [ruthcozien@gmail.com](mailto:ruthcozien@gmail.com) 076 304 6769

And please share this poster with any other mountain lovers who might be able to help us!

## MORE INFO

UKZN Pollination Lab website QR code → <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/25/is-it-a-bird-is-it-a-bee-no-its-a-lizard-pollinating-south-africas-hidden-flower-aoe>



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recently set up the Instagram account [mountain\\_flower\\_photographer](#), with no other goal than to share my love of wild flowers. It has a few followers, a handful of likes, and no particular agenda other than to capture and express my passion for the wild beauty that grows free through the mountains.

As an avid trail runner and mountain biker, I've always loved nature and the outdoors—but I never considered myself much of a botanist. In 2017, I met a mountain lover from the Cape (MCSA member Pierre Jordaan) with a shared desire to explore the Drakensberg extensively. Since then, we've been on an array of mountain missions—running, hiking, fastpacking—in all regions of the Berg. My love for identifying species in general transitioned to a more specific passion for mountain flowers, probably due to the fact that they don't fly away or require telescopic equipment to examine, and can be easily photographed for later identification.

My partner and I are actively acquiring an extensive collection of wild flower photographs. In order to get better captures, I now use a macro lens and a variety of flora field guides to aid my identification. It's my dream to know and photograph every species of Drakensberg mountain flower—although the immensity of that task for a non-botanist is not lost on me. Perhaps one day I'll have a database of Drakensberg flower images comprehensive enough to be used for research publications, field guides, and who knows what else!

So as I meander my way along this trail of life—sometimes wading through fields of flowers, sometimes pushing across patches of dry, burnt veld—I have [mountain\\_flower\\_photographer](#) to document what I capture, and to connect me with likeminded Drakensberg lovers. ▲



*Lower Hlatimba Pass, Loteni Area, December 2021*

*Moraeaia altecola*, Lotheni Pass, November 2021



*Helichrysum* with spider, Lotheni Cave, December 2021





**For more images like these, follow Nicolette on Instagram:  
mountain\_flower\_photographer**

### ***Hey, have you got your journal yet?***

Journals are available for collection until the end of March. If your fees are up to date, you can grab your 2022 sticker while you're at it.

#### **Collection points if you're in DBN and surrounds:**

*The Fitness Factory*

Northwood School

140 Adelaide Tambo Drive

Durban North - Collect and sign at reception

*Gillits Medical Centre*

15 Old Main Road

Gillits - Collect and sign at reception

#### **Collection points if you're in PMB and surrounds:**

*Bush & Bundu*

175 Pietermaritz Street

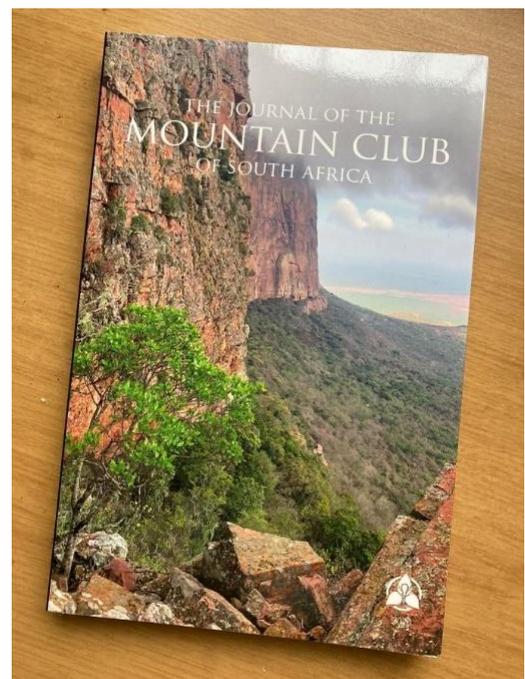
Pietermaritzburg - Collect and sign at the counter

*Mark and Jess*

4 Amberlea

Cherry Lane

Hilton - Please WhatsApp/SMS Jess on 072 2299 406 before you collect.



# Guiding the Girl Guides at Scout Hall

By *Karen Miller*



Since the Hillcrest Scout Hall allows us to store our MCSA Library in their space (and also opens their hall for MCSA KZN Search and Rescue team's supplementary trainings), the KZN Section has agreed to help the Scouts and Girl Guides with outings and education in climbing, mountaineering and hiking.

Over Friday the 3<sup>rd</sup> and Saturday the 4<sup>th</sup>, we were set to teach the girls about camping, and to introduce them to the basics of rock climbing. Many of the girls (aged 11-18) were camping for the very first time, pitching tents and getting set

to spend Friday night out on the Scout's field. That weekend, though, turned out to be a very rainy and misty affair. Some tents leaked, leading to mud, wet hair and soggy jackets. After a marshy camping experience, it was up to the climbing part of the weekend to elevate the adventure.



The Scout Hall has a two-route wall outside, which we used to give the girls an introductory wall climbing experience. Gerald Camp delivered a hilarious and insightful educational talk on rock climbing and the required gear. He rallied the girls' enthusiasm with his own climbing experiences, and soon, under the cover of the eaves, we had the girls harnessed up and climbing. Most of them were first-timers, and it was exciting to see some potentially excellent candidates in this group. Their natural ability to climb needs to be nurtured. We suggested they contact Hillcrest High School, and also told

them about Southern Rock climbing gym in Pinetown and the KZN Junior Climbing Team.



In addition to the exciting climbing exercise, we shared an audio-visual presentation on MSCA KZN Mountain Search and Rescue. The girls were fascinated by elements of the video, including those on searches, helicopter rescues, lost-person behaviours and the outcomes of such rescues and searches. Question time went on for hours, and it was an extreme pleasure to spend some time with these young women.

We've been invited to present to the girls again, to take them on some Berg hikes, and of course to host a climbing day somewhere out on real cliffs. Let's just hope it doesn't rain again! ▲

# Meet Our New Member: *Deon van Heerden*



**Deon van Heerden** is from Mpumalanga, but has always loved the Drakensberg. He and his family enjoy hiking together, and appreciate any time spent in the mountains.

“Experiencing nature makes a person realise the awesomeness of creation,” he says.

Deon has travelled through Botswana and into Namibia, and counts the Cederberg as one of the most beautiful areas he’s camped in. These days he and his family like to go touring with their rooftop, as they can head just about anywhere in it and always be equipped to enjoy the moment.

“Join people who share a love of nature—it doesn’t matter where—and the result will always be good,” he says. “Just get off the beaten track. One life. Live it.” ▲



## STAY AT CAMBALALA COTTAGE

### Cottage:

R100 per night (required as deposit)

### Additional fees:

*Club members:* R70/night

*Non-Club members:* R120/night

*Children over the age of 14 are considered adults. Deposit to be paid at time of reservation. Charges include gas.*

**Contact Clem:** 084 500 4666  
clemnolarobins@gmail.com

**GO OFFLINE...**



**...GET OUTSIDE**

*Got any activities or adventures going on? Remember this newsletter isn’t just about meets and announcements—it’s about recording and sharing our most treasured outdoor memories.*

*Talk to Karen about getting your news, views or reviews featured:*

[rungekaren@gmail.com](mailto:rungekaren@gmail.com)

# Ladies: Try these on for size!

A recommendation from **Jess McTaggart**



Ladies, we all know the frustration. You're packing for a hike, and really don't want to take your bulky tech pants. You'd much prefer your super-comfy, easy-to-stash, always-flattering, favourite leggings. But there's that old problem: they don't have pockets! Which means you'd need a carrier pouch or a fanny pack—something extra that's awkward and bulky. It's that or stick your phone in your pack, risking scratches and pocket dials—and what a hack to dig it out for photos. But, *hallelujah*, God is a woman! Enter leggings with pockets!

These have actually existed for a while, but they used to cost a fortune. Now you can pick up a very reasonably priced pair at **Mr Price Sport**, **Mr Price Clothing**, or **Jam**. Long or short! Happy hiking, girls!

**What we love:** *They're still your usual uber comfy leggings, but now with the added bonus of pockets.*

**What we don't:** *Some pairs only come with one pocket—make sure you get a pocket on the side you want.*

**How we rate them:** ★★★★★

# Climbers: Get your rock shoes fixed right!

A review by **Graeme Bruschi**



**Danny Pinkas** of *Boven Resoles* has been resoling my climbing shoes for several years, and has performed at least eight resoles for me to date. He is always a pleasure to deal with, and his workmanship is excellent.

Danny also recently “re-randed” a pair of my shoes. A “re-rand” is required when the rubber wrapping the front of a shoe wears through, either because the shoe wasn't resoled timeously or from general wear over time.

Check out his website for more details.

**Website:** <https://bovenresoles.wordpress.com/>

**Phone:** 084 780 3114

**Email:** [BovenResoles@gmail.com](mailto:BovenResoles@gmail.com)



*My sincerest thanks to everybody who sent me words or images for inclusion in this issue.*

*The newsletter serves to chronicle our experiences in the mountains we enjoy, and each contribution enriches that record. Please help me keep this newsletter alive by continuing to share the things you do, the things you know, and all the outdoor things we love.*

*Until next month, safe adventures everyone!*



*Karen Miller*

Hey Mountain Club Members

Have a suggestion or idea for inclusion in the next issue?

Is there anything you want to correct, or maybe there's something you'd like to see changed?

Why not drop the editor a message?

*(Just be nice about it!)*

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