



February 2004

Great things are done when men and mountains meet. William Blake

1. FROM THE EDITOR:

While we wander through mountain valleys or crawl up vertical faces, we lose sight sometimes of the fact that what attracts us to the mountains is the beauty, the challenge and the danger. And the tragic death of Rory Lowther, whilst trad-climbing at Swinburne, reminds us that the danger is always there. But so is the beauty and fulfilment. We'll miss you Rory.

In this newsletter, Chris Ziraneke has written of his ascent of Mt. Kenya, and the epic abseil needed after they got off route on the way down.

Congratulations to Alard Hüfner and his party for successfully re-climbing the Central Towers of Paine, and so repeating the awesome feat of Paul Fatti and his group on their first ascent some thirty years ago. Perhaps in the next newsletter we'll have an account of the trip from Allard.

Otherwise, there's plenty of news, and of course a reminder of the AGM on the 24th March.

Terry White

2. LAND, ACCESS, CONSERVATION and all things earthy

Wolkberg:

We wish to advise members that a land claim against our property Wolkberg has been lodged. (This claim is not specifically lodged against our property alone, but includes numerous farms in the vicinity). The committee is working in concert with other parties and legal advisors to navigate the best course through this challenge. We will keep members informed as developments occur.

Royal Natal National Park:

Anyone contemplating climbs in Royal Natal National Park, i.e. Devil's Tooth, Eastern Buttress, Amphitheatre Wall or such like, must first get in touch with the authorities there. Mosesat Tendele Tel No:036 438 6411

Help us keep our access rights:

Please familiarise yourselves with the correct access information - as stated in the meet list or phone the Land & Access convenor or the administrator.

3. PORTFOLIO REPORT By Greg Devine

After ten years on the committee, five of them as chairman, I feel it is time to stand down for a while. There are two reasons. Firstly, I don't think it is a good idea in a club for one person to hang in for too long and to become entrenched. The other reason is the toll it takes on ones reserves of mental energy.

People sometimes ask me where I get the time to be chairman. Time is not actually the problem, you can always find time somewhere, amongst the chunks that we waste along the way. What has been a bit of a problem of late is finding the will and enthusiasm to get to grips with the multitude of current issues.

One of the duties of a chairman is to be part of Cencom, the central or national committee, which meets twice a year in Cape Town. If you are particularly unlucky you could be made a member of Exco, the central committee executive. Then in addition to all your own section issues are all the national ones as well.

Fortunately in our section we have a very enthusiastic and capable committee and from my perspective most things run themselves with very little input from me. Land ownership and access problems still seem to be the most onerous job, followed probably by the related portfolios of membership, outreach and public relations.

I have enjoyed my time on the committee and the sense of involvement that came with it. I must admit that quite often I sat in a meeting, listening to someone going on, and thinking, what has this got to do with anything, lets just dump it and go climbing. Sometimes we did.

Greg Devine

4. ODE TO THE CHAIRMAN (Written by committee members during one of the meetings)

Greg, the Devine. Glasses nobly perched

on an august engineering nose

Keeps order... swift, just and sure

At a meeting of mountain minds and voluminous prose.

Ah, how we will miss your: "Enough waffling, let's move on",

Decisions are waiting to be expedited, ordered, examined but...

We'll get you back (to the committee that is),

Because you still haven't collected the "Chairman's Luxury Car Fund", and your cut

5. Mount Kenya - South West Ridge Route - December 2003 by Chris Ziraneke

Chris Prinsloo and I needed a challenge. I had unfinished business on Mt Kenya from 4.5 years ago. It was a toss up whether we would spend Christmas in the Cape Cederberg or on Mt Kenya. That is until I showed Chris my slides from the previous trip. Chris has the Land Rover and was eager to fulfill his dream of driving up to East Africa. It is not difficult to see how things developed.

Five solid days of driving, copious tanks of diesel and two speeding fines later, we crossed over the border into Kenya. The roads had been excellent on the whole, allowing us to travel at 110km per hour most of the time. We had missed Zim, due to fuel and political problems, taking the much quieter route through Botswana and over the ferry at Kazungula into Zambia.

I had been in contact with Charles Rethman from the Mountain Club of Kenya. He was wonderfully supportive, answering my endless questions about the mountain. Eventually Chris and I settled on the SW Ridge route. "Much quieter and cleaner than the SE Normal Route that sees a lot of traffic at this time of the year. This route will satisfy your unfinished business. But the rock is not such good quality" said Charles. This route also has the bonus of getting us directly to the top of Batian (5199 meters) the higher of Mt Kenya's twin peaks by 11 meters. We stopped at his house in Nairobi where he gave us a detailed hand written RD and showed us plenty of photos.

Leaving the vehicle at the Sirimon gate of the Mount Kenya Park, we hiked in, first to Shipton's Camp, where we hiked up to Point Lenana, then on to MacKinder's Camp. We acclimatized for 5 days before attempting our main climb, I wanted no chance of altitude sickness this time. Mt Kenya is notorious for people ascending far too quickly as the distances are relatively short.

The official RD of the SW Ridge is two paragraphs long. "Begin the climb near the top of the snow of the western side of the Darwin Glacier, where smooth, gentle slabs allow a rising traverse to be made into the notch between Point Slade and Batian". And that's about all.

Christmas Day saw Chris and I hiking up to the base of the climb. The smooth, gentle slabs are unmistakable, though the snow of the Darwin Glacier is now about 150 meters away due to global warming. We spent the night bivvying out so we could start climbing at first light. We had the Diamond Couloir and the Ice Window routes right in front of us. These were 2 classic ice routes. Now the Ice Window had no ice at all, and the Diamond Couloir had a waterfall coming down it, and occasionally some huge rock falls as the sun melted the ice towards the latter part of the day. Some of the rock falls were terrifying, as occasionally a rock the size of a TV would bounce up to a couple of hundred meters from the base.

Boxing day saw us up at first light. The route basically ascends the rising slabs on the east of the ridge to the ridge itself and just over the top of the ridge onto its west side. Ahead of us many rope lengths through a chossy amphitheater just to the left of the ridge, until the ridge narrows and the route follows a spectacular section with 5-600m drop offs on either side. At the end of this narrow section, there are 2 tiny bivvy sites. Then it is 2 pitches over the 'Tower' to a superb bivvy site, and 4 pitches later, the summit of Batian itself.

After 20 pitches, we were only at the base of Tower. Light was failing, and we had to content ourselves with the lesser of the bivvy sites. We did, however, have the pleasure of seeing the sun rise the next morning, bathing in its first warmth, something the larger bivvy site did not get.

Four pitches later, and we were on top of Batian. It was great. For four and a half years I had dreamt of being there. My unfinished business was concluded. We melted ice and snow to make a celebration drink. I wanted to tell all my friends and family. Unbelievably, we got cell phone reception, but the network wouldn't allow me to make any calls.

We still had to get down. The easiest way was down the abseil route descending Nelion (5188 meters), Mt Kenya's slightly lower twin peak. However, that meant crossing the gate of the mists. That for me was the scariest part. Neither of us had snow and ice experience, and no ice axes or crampons. But we managed, Chris leading most of the way. Then on to Howell's hut and a very welcome green, hand painted sign 'to rap'. We went down the first ab, but failed to see the sign to the traverse part. So 2 abs later, realised we were off route, and had quite an epic getting back to the right descent, doing the last 3 abs in the dark.

What a relief it was to get back to MacKinder's camp. It was the toughest mountaineering experience I have ever had. The pads of all but two of my fingers were cut and bleeding from the sharp rock.

The weather had been very kind to us, with little of the thick mist that usually shrouds the mountain from midday to night fall. We had a wonderful view from the summit. Equally, I was grateful that some unseen hand had kept us safe through many possible, yet unrealised perils. You don't conquer a mountain like that, it allows you the climb.

Our one real problem was with the porters. We had hired two porters from the Naro Moru office of the Mount Kenya Porters and Guides Association. One of our porters came on to the mountain with the flu, causing us to re-schedule our days on the mountain. Had he infected either of us with his flu, our entire trip would have been sabotaged. In addition, both porters eventually tried to extract the maximum amount of money from us, even though their rates have almost doubled, in July 2003, from 350 to 650 Kenyan Shillings per leg. I would recommend that this office be avoided like the plague. There are many other places to hire good caliber porters and guides.

The drive back was a bit of an ordeal. We took in Tsavo National Park, stayed a couple of days on the south Mombasa coast and stopped at the Kapishya hot springs in northern Zambia. Then it was home sweet home. We had driven just over 10,000km round trip, used just over 1,000 litres of diesel. It was good to be back.

The Central Tower of Paine

Alard Hüfner

A team of 6 MCSA members: Alard Hüfner, Mark Seuring, Michael Mason, Dermot Brogan, Marianne Pretorius and Voitec Modrzewski, left the heat wave of Gauteng to climb in the freezing conditions of Southern Patagonia. They spent December 2003 and January 2004 climbing the South African route on the Central Tower of Paine, Chile. The East Face of the Central Tower was first climbed in 1973/74 by a South African team of Paul Fatti, Mike Scott, Art McGarr, Mervyn Prior, Roger Fuggle and Richard Smithers. It was at the time, one of the largest rock faces ever climbed, and a mile stone in bigwall climbing. This route had stayed unrepeatable for 30 years.

The route follows the obvious corner just right of the centre of the tower, graded at 20 / A3. We free climbed the first 400m (the slabs) and then aided most of the way to the shoulder where we could free climb again. Many of the cracks were iced up so progress was slow.

Our first day on the rock was 15 December and we summited on 13 January 2004. During this period 15 days were spent actually climbing and the rest of the time was hauling gear and food or waiting for better weather.

We fixed lines most of the way up to about 250 meters below the summit, of this 1.2km high rock face. The ropes were cleaned on our descent, but sections snagged on flakes so we had to cut and leave them. It was fascinating to find sections of iced up rope and old gear, left by the pioneers 30 years ago.

Alard, Mark, Marianne and Voitec topped out on the false summit of the Central Tower. Dermot and Mike were unable to summit due to injuries and early flights back home. Marianne was the first woman to climb the East Face of the Central Tower, and the 3 to reach the top. We reached the false summit at 7pm in howling winds, gusting mist and light snowfall - due to these conditions, and the long way back to the porta ledges, we decided it was not safe to continue the short distance along a ridge to the actual summit. The joy of finally standing, on the top of the South African route, was overwhelming. For 20 minutes we savoured our excitement, as the biting winds would clear the mist revealing breathtaking views of beautiful scenery below.

A huge THANK YOU to all our sponsors:

The Mountain Club of South Africa

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Cape Storm

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6.MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Membership

With deep regret:

The Mountain Club of South Africa (Johannesburg Section) wishes to express its deepest sympathies to the Lowther family.

Rory Lowther was trad-climbing at Swinburne on Tuesday 3 February when he took a fall in the afternoon. Rory's gear popped and he fell 20m, sustaining head injuries. Climbers on scene called the emergency rescue number but unfortunately there was nothing that could be done. Rory died before medics reached the scene.

Rory was well known for his lively passion for climbing, opening new routes and botting. He developed the Harry Potter area at Chossple and was involved in opening the new climbing area at Pelindaba. Rory was also instrumental in both compiling and publishing the route book "Craggs of Gauteng".

Rory's passing is a deep loss for his family and many friends. The climbing community will sorely miss his abundant energy and drive and ability to get things done.

New Members:

We welcome the following new members:

Sandy Fromentin, Herman Potgieter, Paulo Ines, Gigi van der Riet, Samantha Ryan, Francois de Bruyn, Adrian van Lieshout, Georga Zadok, David Amm, David Gur, Eric Hunter, Leanne Heapy –ordinary members Jason Oppler,(temporary) and family members Amy Leigh and Dylan Fromentin, Zachary and Laila Smith, Carol Ann Metcalfe transferred from Cape Town to our section.

Transfers:

Michel le Sueur to Cape Town, Bronwyn Howard to Magaliesberg section,

Resigned: Lisa Steingold, Catherine da Camara and Elizabeth Reid.

Passed away:

Former member Ron Slatem passed away in December 2003.

7.CLUB NEWS

Mid week meets:

Members who are interested in joining this group please contact Uschi 011 807 1310.

Hamerkop week:

The section's week at Hamerkop is from 1 June to 7 June 2004. Members who wish to use the house, please contact Uschi to book. Please note that the section is having their meet at the weekend 5 & 6 June. Members are welcome to join the meet but prior booking is essential if you wish to stay overnight. The hut fees apply - R20 per member per night, R30 non members per night.

2004 Subscriptions: thank you to members who have paid their 2004 subs. To the others who have not – please do so as soon as possible. Thank you to members who sent donations to our various funds.

MCSA Annual Dinner:

10 July PM Burg further details later.

Journal Index Vol 3 (1979 – 2000) have arrived – if you ordered one from Uschi, these can now be collected. Some will be for sale at R20

Rock climbing courses:

The Section's courses will take place March 28 & 29 at Upper Tonquani and 15 & 15 August (Trad climbing), 16 May and 4 July at Strubensvalley (Intro and Sport) . Please contact Julia 083 367 6649. Costs: R100 for one day session and R250 for the weekend. Booking essential.

Library:

We have Alex Harris' new book "Rocks and Hard Places" which was launched recently. This is an account of his journey to the highest mountain on every continent.

Annual General Meeting:

The Annual General Meeting of the Mountain Club of South Africa Johannesburg Section will take place on Wednesday 24th March 2004 at 20h15 at the Waverley Girl Guide Hall, Scott & Stirling Streets, Waverley.

Agenda enclosed. Minutes of AGM March 2003 and Special General Meeting October 2003 are available from Andrew Porter or Uschi.

Committee members: if members would like to serve on the committee or who would like to nominate someone, please contact committee members. Get your nomination form from Uschi

Committee meeting dates: provisional dates 29 March, 10 May, 21 June

Meet Leaders Forum: all meetleaders and interested members are invited to another discussion on 10 March. Refreshments will be served.

8.GENERAL MCSA NEWS

NATIONAL MEET:

The MCSA (Magaliesberg Section) invites members from other sections to join us at the National Meet to be held over Easter 2004 in the Magaliesberg for a feast of rock climbing, kloofing and hiking in a temperate climate.

Dates: 4-11 April 2004 (*dates fall within school holidays and includes the Easter long weekend*).

Activities: Rock climbing galore (trad and sport), one day and multi day hikes of varying degree of difficulty, kloofing.

Food: The camp will be self-catering except for a braai on Sunday evening, 4 April 2004.

Cost: R140.00 per person (to cover expenses including the braai).

Closing date for applications: 29 February 2004 (Limit on numbers: 100 persons. Please book early to avoid disappointment and to make our planning easier). Children are welcome to accompany their parents/guardians.

Base Camp: Base camp will be situated at Maretwane, in the heart of the Magaliesberg, 26km from the Hartebeespoort Dam (which is about 50km from Pretoria and from Johannesburg) on the road to Rustenburg. During the camp, various Magaliesberg kloofs and areas will be visited, such as Tonquani, Mhlabatini, Grootkloof etc., and other interesting activities will be offered.

Contact persons for applications and information:

Lenise de Kock: tel: 012-345 4586 (weekdays 8:00-10:00); e-mail: camp2004@mag.mcsa.org.za

Petro Grobler: tel: 012-809 1022 (h)

Gerhard Venter: tel: 011-976 2314 (h a/h); e-mail: chair@mag.mcsa.org.za

Camp convenor: Petrus Nel: phone: 012-998 6131 (h), 012-429 4877 (w), 082-578 9115 (cell); e-mail: treasurer@mag.mcsa.org.za

9.FOR SALE

MCSA Kit Bag

The kit bag will be big enough to accommodate a full size rucksack plus tent and lots of other smaller items, but still be small enough for easy handling. Two of these bags make up an ideal donkey load. There will be a carry loop and two shoulder straps, so it can be portaged as well. The top end opening can either be closed with a clip or locked with a pad lock. It will come in purple 1000 denier Duracore fabric with yellow printing. The printing includes MCSA logos and contact details and an area on which the owners name and address can be written with a marking pen. It will sell for R390 including VAT. Packaging and post extra R35 Contact Ulrike Kiefer: 907 7438 w, 907 6605h.

Stuffable Camping Pillows

Our pillows come in two sizes – small and large! They are ideal for any situation where a compressible, lightweight pillow is required.

Features: strong polyester cotton outer, polyester hollow fibre filling, stuffs into an integral pouch,

sleeve which allows for jumper or fleece jacket (in fact any clothing) to be inserted to add extra depth, range of funky colours, machine washable, cost-effective!

Prices: Small: R55 each; Large: R 75 each.

Contact: Heather on (011) 444-4155 (evenings), or on Cell : 082-6769-786, or Russ or Heather via e-mail at : heatheruss@eject.co.za

The pillows are also available at Club evenings, every first Wednesday of the month.

Stop Press: congratulations to Julia Davies, Grant Rens and Roland Magg on passing the Single Pitch Instructors course.