



August 2005

1. FROM THE EDITOR

WOW!! We have seen some phenomenal ascents by MCSA members this year. On the 3rd of June Alex Harris completed his round up of the highest peak on each continent. The last to succumb was indeed the big one, Mt Everest, via the North Ridge. With him was Swazi born game ranger Sibusiso Vilane on his second trip to the summit, his previous ascent was from the South. A few other South African's also made it to the top this year via the South side. Following the road less travelled, on Sunday 21st of August at about 2pm S.A. time, Peter Lazarus, James Pitman, Marianne Pretorius and Andreas Kiefer accomplished the first South African summit of Trango Tower- with Marianne Pretorius being only the third woman to reach the summit. So, we have some exciting slides and club evenings to look forward to this year. This edition is quite unique in that it features contributions representing almost all the areas of club activity. The dismal report from Trango Towers, before the summit attempt, Paul Brouard's climb at the July 2005 world sport climbing competition, an enticing article on what Kwa-Zulu Natal has to offer the climber, confessions of a gear freak, the Johannesburg section's first draft of our development policy (it's about time), feedback on the first draft of the Drakensberg wilderness management plan, and a Canadian citizens view on the joys of patrolling Tonquani, A.K.A., the dietary preferences of the Magaliesberg vervet monkey. With spring in the air, I trust that this edition will remind you of what dreams are made of. Get away from the computer you are reading this from (apparently the E-mail glitch has been fixed), phone a friend, and get out there and do something you have always dreamed of doing.

Peter Adrian

2. EXPEDITION NEWS

It was touch and go for the South African expedition attempting to climb Trango Tower, also known as Nameless Tower. For those of you who don't know, Trango Tower is the highest BIG WALL in the world, the summit sits at an altitude of over 6000m, and is surrounded by the taller, but perhaps less technically demanding Himalayan peaks K2, Broad Peak, the Gasherbrums and others. Imagine climbing 30 pitches of overhanging ice filled cracks in howling winds, with a bad headache, and you get the picture. For the all the news, and some absolutely brilliant pictures, look it up on <http://www.satransgo.co.za/reports.htm>. For those without internet access, I have taken the liberty to cut and paste a few extracts from the site, for a taste of presentations to come.

FOILED BY A BLIZZARD 100m FROM THE SUMMIT!!!

James: Thursday 11 August saw us safely ensconced on the shoulder of the Tower, Peter and Andreas having put up the final pitch and helped Marianne and James with the last of the strenuous hauling. We bedded down in the two portaledges with 2 groups of Koreans hogging all available tent space.

The shoulder is 10 pitches (\pm 300 vertical metres) above the "col", which comprises the top of the gully. From the shoulder it's 20 vertical (sometimes overhanging!) pitches (i.e. about 650 metres) to the summit. Our plan, to put fixed lines up to within striking distance of the summit, climbing in pairs of two, and with fair weather we were expecting to do a final overnight push for the summit as a full team of four.

Friday to Sunday saw us inching our way up the wall, negotiating steep and often iced-up cracks. The first two days we were forced to climb through wind and snow. Sunday, however, dawned immaculate. Wide blue skies and the full Karakoram panorama below us. Below our noses spread the drama of K2, Broad Peak, Gasherbrums' I and IV, the Baltoro Glacier and more.

Sunday evening we decided that on the morrow James and Marianne would set out at dawn in an attempt to get the lines up the final 3 pitches to the "bivi ledge", allegedly found at the top of the 24th pitch, 6 from the summit. Peter and Andreas would be hauling overnight gear behind – sleeping bags, down jackets, bivi bags, a stove and some food for a night out at over 6000m! Tuesday we would push for the summit, starting early and thereafter retreat all the way back to the shoulder, retrieving ropes on the route.

Monday dawned perfect and by 3pm James and Marianne had forged their way to the bivillage (sloping, iced-up and smaller than a single bed) and Marianne set off up the pitch above, a nasty off-width. Time constraints prevent the full story being told but she squeaked over the lip to find an angled ice pitch above. James rappelled down three pitches to take over the hauling and Andreas jumared up with crampons and ice axes, to thrash his way to the top of the ice pitch.

7pm saw us all safely ensconced on the "bivillage" for the night, our fixed ropes two pitches above us and only 5 pitches left to cover. The stupendous view before us, to the north, east and south, was tempered by the ominous, though distant omen of clouds, coming in from the south west, and the prospect of an uncomfortable night out at over 6000m!

Tuesday saw us rise early. The weather had turned nasty, snow and wind. James, in rock shoes (one of his ice boots had become dislodged from the pack the previous day!), and Andreas set out to forge the final 5 pitches, before the full storm came in. Marianne and Peter packed up, to facilitate a quick decent, and followed them up.

The storm hit us, full force, at the top of the 28th pitch, two short of the summit. Howling wind plastered snow to the rock, and froze it into instant verglas. James, at the top of pitch 28, couldn't look upward for the force of the driving snow. Moreover, his feet, in rock shoes, had frozen into solid blocks, icicles were hanging from his fringe, and without his down jacket (a pitch below) he was unable to clean the ice off his spitfire jacket as fast as it formed.

Andreas cleaned the gear from the pitch and Marianne juggled up the fixed line to join James. A shouted conference was held with Peter below. The inevitable but difficult and painful decision was made. Retreat seemed the only safe option. By mid day we were all back at the shoulder, in various states of disarray. The storm continued unabated.

Now we're back in base camp recovering, building up our strength once again, and planning our next and final assault. We need only two good days – one to melt the ice, and one to finish the climb. This way hopefully we'll summit in good weather, with attendant views. The weather gods (ie; the internet, as conveyed by Rose) suggest improving weather from Friday 19/8 to Monday. Hopefully we'll conquer this damned rock before another 5 days are up. Our guide, Amjad, reckons "Inshallah". We reckon whether Allah likes it or not!!!!

Marianne: "We've reached the shoulder and snow continues. The air is icy and burns my nostrils. Yet this place is completely mystical. Mountains between 6000 – 8000m surrounds us in thick snow clouds.

From our shoulder camp we can see K2, Broad peak, Gashabrum 4 and 1. When it's clear I can see for miles and it seems that the Karakoram has no end. We're right in the centre of it – seems an odd place to be in such hostile conditions yet the magic and beauty of these gigantic mountains creeps into your soul and bites. Could be why we keep coming back for more.

There are 2 black crows lurking around our shoulder camp. With such ease they glide up towards the summit and within less than a minute lands on a patch of snow near our camp. This is their home and playground. No vertical rock face or snow storms will shake their nerves."

Peter: "Off width cracks are always intimidating and the one on pitch 16 of the Slovenian Route, I knew was something to be reckoned with. It was Marianne and my turn to climb (James and Andreas having climbed the previous day) and Marianne had just finished the "pendulum pitch" (which involved a 4 to 5 meter pendulum off some rather mancky looking pegs to gain a crack – all done in ice climbing boots).

The off-width crack fell to be my lead, but it's bark turned out to be far worse than its bite. Apart from having to hold onto ice filled cracks, and having to clean the cracks of ice in order to place gear, and two snow storms, the pitch was complete in a mere 4 hours! Marianne, by this time, had herself turned into a block of ice and we decided to rap off back to the shoulder to thaw out.

When we reached the shoulder, the weather had changed dramatically and we were treated to the most magnificent sunset I have ever seen! The evening sky was cobalt blue and the snow fields on the adjoining Great Trango and the surrounding peaks had assumed a cyan/magenta hue. In the distance (and not very far, at that), the peaks of K2, Gasherbrum I and IV pierced the Karakoram sky in majestic splendour, their summits still bathed in crimson light. I was awestruck – it was truly the most spectacular sunset scene I have witnessed."

3. COMPETITION CLIMBING NEWS

Munich World Championships 2005

'How do you stay so calm?' asks the Australian competitor beside me. I'm competing in the World Climbing Championships held in Munich from the 1st to the 5th of July. The comment by the wiry Australian woman, is probably the funniest I've heard all day. I've had very little sleep, I feel extremely shaky, and I know I have the tunnel vision of the very nervous. I can't think further than one hold ahead, and I wonder what obvious foothold, clip or rest I'm going to miss.

Observation time: O.M.G. these routes are huge, I haven't done anything longer than 12 moves or so in months. [note how I sneak in my excuses]. Do I bother with looking at the last moves? The competitors around me look manic, like people at the scene of an accident, so eager to see their fate. They gesticulate and bump into each other in their eagerness to see the routes, while asking their friends hurried questions about sequences and hold sizes. Some even have powerful binoculars. I try to stay above it and nonchalantly walk away from the crowd to scan the route from a distance: There are two qualifiers, Route 1 curves elegantly right before heading back up the main wall - *I mustn't forget the hold around the corner and the possible heel-hook rest.* Route 2 is splattered with tiny black holds, is difficult to read, and goes straight up the left wall. It looks even harder than the first, no rests anywhere.

Route 1: *Okay, breath deeply, try to climb quickly, it's your only chance.* The climbing is fairly easy and I'm cruising, fluid and precise. I'm styling. *Now where's that rest? I've missed it!* And I've crossed my hands in the process, I keep going, but I'm getting too pumped, my elbows are rising, but I punch out a few more moves to ¾ height before falling. I feel desperately disappointed in my climbing and I try to analyse why. I didn't think I was taking the competition that seriously; and so it clarifies some things about my climbing motivation and about how I deceive myself about my own ability. I realize how much I enjoy climbing well. Much of my disappointment is as a result of not quite climbing to my own standards, and in not having my skill recognised by anyone. Here I am, the lowest of the low and no one congratulates me on my effort. More distasteful, is that despite my best efforts to resist it, I've built up a conception of myself as being a super-good climber, better than most others, partly because amongst the climbers I have been in contact with over the last while, I am untouchable. Now this conception is shattered.

Back to isolation: Many of the climbers here seem unhappy and there is little humour, perhaps because like me, the competitors are taking the event too seriously. It brings to mind this quote by the Buddha:

"Victory breeds hatred. The defeated live in pain. Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat."

Even winners become unhappy, because they have to protect themselves – everyone is after their titles.

There are also competitors who, in contrast, seem unfazed, they chat and smile. These are often the best climbers, like Yuji Hirayama excluding yourself from the worst aspects of competitions, and comparison frees up energy to focus and climb well.

Route 2: Again I start well, but fluff a clip (the draw has been lengthened and swings around) for a good 30 seconds. I manage to climb while viciously pumped by concentrating on the movements, and through the help of a few loud grunts! But I feel much better about my climbing this time, I feel I have given 100% effort. With the pressure off, I relax and watch the others. The men's final is a wandering stamina-fest, a race to the top. Unfortunately, for the spectators, three climbers top out and the result is decided by the semi-final points. The winner is the Czechoslovakian Tomas Mzarek, a quick climber, with excellent route-reading skills. The women's final is far more interesting: strangely, apart from the winner (her first major win) the placing after the final is just about switched after the placing in the semi-finals - so lots of upsets. The route climbs up to a big orange blob (which looks like the just licked top of an upside down ice-cream cone) at ¾ height. Those who manage to find a rest behind the blob, do well. However, the winner, Angela Eiter from Austria, misses the rest, looks shaky at the bottom (where others styled), pulls it together and incredibly, just keeps going to eventually touch the last hold, and looks disappointed! It is such a gutsy effort I get gooseflesh.

Bouldering: A day later I competed in the bouldering event and did equally badly. **Results:** All results and more information are on <http://www.uiaaclimbing.com/>

Lead (Men):

1. MRAZEK Tomás CZE
2. USOBIAGA Patxi ESP
3. CHABOT Alexandre FRA

81. BROUARD Paul RSA

Lead (women):

1. EITER Angela AUT
2. HARRINGTON Emily USA
3. NOGUCHI Akiyo JPN

Men (bouldering):

1. RAKHMETOV Salavat RUS
2. FISCHHUBER Kilian AUT
3. POUVREAU Gérome FRA

71. BROUARD Paul RSA

Women (bouldering):

1. SHALAGINA Olha UKR
2. ABRAMTCHO. Ioulia RUS
3. KOTASOVA Vera CZE

Finally, a big thanks you to the MCSA, the UIAA for the last minute invitation and sponsorship, and the UIAA and DAV for the organisation of the comp. Thanks especially to Alan Jarvis, Sebastian Lamm.

Paul Brouard, July 2005

4. LAND AND ACCESS

Bronkies Crag

The access fee of R25 per vehicle has been changed to R10 per person, effective from the 10th of September 2005. Visitors are also reminded to use the upper driveway entrance to the main house and not the lower one. The correct route to the house to pay the access fee and sign the book, is from the brick driveway that access the house from the East, and not the lower entrance that access the house from the South.

Cambalala House

One of the perks of belonging to the MCSA is having access to a number of mountain huts around the country. Cambalala House has been leased by the KwaZulu-Natal Section since 1973 and is situated in a spectacular and peaceful setting at the top of Mike's Pass in the Cathedral Peak area. It has 3 bedrooms, is furnished (with gas stove, and **geyser**) and is extremely reasonably priced. The cottage has been maintained by various members of the KZN Section as a very personal place enabling access to the Drakensberg, either as a starting point for climbs in the area, or to nurture their children in the love of mountains and nature.

The cottage is let to a member of the MCSA (any Section) who is responsible for picking up and returning keys and gas bottles, and for the cleaning of the cottage, ready for the next occupants. Keys and gas are available at three points: Martin Winter at Frere near Winterton, Kay Nixon in Pietermaritzburg and Maureen Thomson in Pinetown. Non-members may also use the cottage if with a member at an extra charge per night, and in the ratio of two non-members to one member. As Berg climbing has declined so has the use of this hut... So, go climb in the Cathedral Peak area and use Cambalala as your base, or chill with the family, mountain bike and enjoy the view. Use it - or, lose it. Further information is available from Maureen Thomson (Tel/Fax: 031-702 3969; Tel: 031-709 1254; e-mail: maurn@telkomsa.net).

Harrismith

Mt Everest resort has changed its name to 'Eagle Mountain Game Lodge'. The opening times are: Sunday to Thursday, 7am – 9pm, and Friday & Saturday, 7am – 10pm. Contact and booking details remain the same.

White Umfolozi

The land surrounding the crags on the north and south banks has been sold to separate landowners. Climbers are no longer allowed unconditional access to both banks. The current situation is delicate and fluid.

5. HIKING AND CONVALESCENCE

PATROL WEEKEND #1

9-10 April 2005

Of all the reasons I have for being in South Africa, I'm a Canadian citizen by birth, this PATROL WEEKEND, and my membership of the MCSA, are the things I am most proud of. I boasted to all my SA friends about it, explained my deep love of the mountains and land, and have come to understand, this was to be for me, a major accomplishment. Four years ago, the first time I came to SA, for work purposes, something in me was so very touched by the land, that I said to work friends, "Surely there must be beautiful places to walk and hike in, close by." I was right, there was! My first walk was to Retief's Kloof, in the group that came to be my nature friends, Sam led that walk, and told us of the plant life, insects, birds, and trees. I remember how I went silent in my soul, stunned by the beauty I was seeing, almost not believing it was real. I asked, "Are you sure this is not a set, (I work in the film industry), just put here for us?" They laughed, not realising how touched I was. I felt I had found "home" something I'd looked for, but not touched so closely, and so far from home.

I remember looking at the golden, pink orange rocks, glittering like quartz, thinking I must remove my shoes, and walk delicately on the rock jewels. And the grasses, precious. We sat at the top of one side and looked over the vast wide vista. It looked like underwater land from ages ago. I felt at peace. I still pinch myself. I feel so fortunate to have met my friends there, in those beautiful mountains, with those extraordinary pools, eagles, baboons. Bengt, Gerard, Sam and all the others encouraged this love of the Magaliesberg, "Please, please, can we go walking in the mountains, became my mantra to them."

I don't know, if people from here, realise what an exceptional treasure these mountains are. Unique, old, full of beauty, and something else which I still haven't found the name for yet. I know in all certainty, that in these mountains, that first experience, led me back to SA, three years later. It's been a year and a half, and my friends sponsored me over time, and I was proud to become an MCSA member. And then came the "PATROL WEEKEND"! I was proud, I told everyone at work, my friends and family at home, the staff at Cape Union Mart, everyone I could. "Staff at work made sure I was not booked for any work that weekend".

And so, Saturday morning, we all went off, myself, Gerard, Bengt and the others. Tents, food, and much happiness. The weather was perfect. Up the mountain we went, found the perfect spot, set up camp, and looked around. There were quite a few baboons sitting in groups, large groups, sitting on rocks, watching us looking at them. One group was at least 50 baboons. The land looked happy and green. Plant life looked healthy and nourished by rain. The vista was exceptional. Thankfully there was no litter seen. A beautiful sunset was appreciated by all.

That night, my imagination, being what it is, I imagined lions and cheetahs walking around my tent – I was somewhat worried! That was part of the adventure. Alas, it turned out to be little grey monkeys, as I found out the next morning. I arose early enough to watch the sun rise, as did others. It must have been about 6:15am, when surprised baboon sounds and then similar sounds by humans, echoed from the area that Bengt was sleeping in. A group of baboons had nearly tripped over Bengt, sleeping in their path on a rock. Imagine their surprise. Here they were, walking to their normal place to watch the sunrise, and they trip over one of those hairless creatures called humans! The big baboon screamed in surprise, woke Bengt up, who screamed back in surprise, and the baboons took off. What excitement so early in the morning. I then went off to find a spoon for someone, left my tent open for less than five minutes, and returned to see things thrown out of my tent. Cheetahs, lions...thoughts through my mind! Alas, it was a lone grey/blue little monkey. He took off with the biltong, but he didn't like calamata olives, chewed, punctured and thrown the pack away. Perfect, that was part of what the experience should be. But the lions, the cheetahs, when would they come? ☺

I was proud to gently stop people and talk with them..."Are you members, etc..." I found it hard to ask people to take off their packs and show their membership cards. A gentle patrol. No mishaps, everyone hiking was gentle. No loud boisterous rowdy humans this weekend. Gerard explained to me the use of the spade.

The baboons in their gang, sat on the rocks again, Sunday afternoon. Must have been about 30°C this day. Big beautiful dark beetles, birds I couldn't name, the beautiful Cedarburg stream, all stunning. Surely there are things I am forgetting now, but I, MCSA member, foreigner, Canadian, far from home had done it... my first "PATROL WEEKEND"! I was very proud. Thanks to all who made it happen.

Catherine Pantaropoulos

6. RETAIL THERAPY FOR GEAR JUNKIES

My ideal rack

So, you need a new rack, Yippee, what a pleasure!!! It doesn't happen often, but in the event that you find yourself with a mega-bonus, or an insurance payout for stolen gear, or you just have the bucks and need some serious retail therapy, here is an article by an over analytical, self confessed gear junkie that would pay a fortune for gear, if I knew it would fit in anywhere and stay put while I quiver and shake up a desperate crack.

Passive Protection

It was Merv Prior who once told me that the only gear you need is two nuts, so long as they are made of steel. After examining his home made rack offbits and bobs dangling from sections of retired sailing rope, I saw his point. I must confess, I am a lesser man, and dragging at least one full set of nice shiny colour coded nuts up a cliff gives me great comfort.

Micro nuts: I'm no expert in this department, and the only time I've ever used them, is to fill the space between my ears, in the hope that the thin wires will re-connect the neurons in my head and convince me that I'm doing this for fun, and "I'm not gonna die!", and "yes, that alloy wafer sticking halfway out a flaring crack will hold". What I do find, is that the small brass nuts on wire, HB off set nuts or the new Black Diamond Micro stoppers provide a much stronger cable to nut size ratio, than the drill through variety, which bear quite pathetic cables in the small sizes. The softer copper brass alloys tend to stick to rock a bit better. If you buy a set you will never use them, and if you don't buy some, one day you'll wish you had some to fill that head space.

Chocks on wire: Despite attempts by other manufacturers to be innovative, if you ask yourself, why are wheels round? The answer is simple, any other shape just doesn't work as well. The original Wild Country Rocks, and Black Diamond Stoppers are the stuff. If forced to split hairs, I'd go for the BD Stoppers, as the aluminium tends to be slightly softer and sticks to the crystal structure of the rock a little better. In truth, I carry both, a full set of wire Stoppers and a half set of Rocks, as I find a single set can be too few on long pitches, and two sets are a bit too heavy to drag around. The slight variations in design and size allows one the luxury to refine a placement to perfection.

Big things that go DING! For a while I was quite tempted to buy some Camp TriCams, funky lob sided metal blobs with a half moon rounded side, an odd rotating sling position and a single pivot point on the other side. Quite versatile and very ingenious pro that can be used as a passive "stopper" or in a kind of on sprung "semi-cammed" mode, almost like a cam. There are climbers who swear by them, and judging by the number of these things I have found permanently "placed" on popular crags in the states, I guess they really do work! Limestone pockets and hand rails are their forte. After drooling for a while, I didn't buy them. They are hard to come by in SA, they are heavier and cost a lot more than conventional large chocks and hexes, and they are no joke to remove for the mechanically challenged. Might as well buy more cams for the same weight. In the end I went for the good old fashioned hexes, well almost. The Black Diamond Hexcentrics on spectra cord are nice and light, but since I've never seen machine angled cracks in nature, the curved Wild Country Rockcentrics had more appeal. In retrospect, I don't think I've actually ever managed to successfully cam one of those babies, like you see in the text books. More like a desperate one arm swing into the large fissure high above your head, followed by a hopeful tug, and then clip and rest. Of course the best feature of these things, is the nice cow bell ding the big sizes produce to alert lurking leopards of your approach, and to give unsuspecting nudists enough time to dive for cover when you make your way out the kloof in the twilight hours! Hopefully the next generation will be made of graphite, and will be much quieter! Sizes 5-7 are most useful.

Active protection

There are a few fundamentals here, the first is the ratio between the camming range, and the width of the unit. This is where most manufacturers go wrong, they tool up to make different sizes from same design. The small units tend to be too wide, in proportion to their camming range, resulting in the fact that the crack needs to be almost perfectly parallel over the width of the unit to be able to function properly off all four cams. The narrower the width of the unit, the more tolerant the cam is of non-uniform cracks. The large units are often too narrow for their wide camming range, and are in danger of "twisting" out of place. So essentially the one model fits all is too idealistic. You need to mix and match a bit at the extreme ends of the scale.

The little guys: there are a lot of new comers to the market, and even the makers of the monster BD Camalots have come to the little boys picnic. Wild Country are pushing the Zero's, but Colorado Custom Hardware (CCH) are still tops in the mini sizes with their Aliens. These units are narrower than other makes due to the internal spring mechanism, so they fit better in pockets and irregular cracks and they are a lot more flexible, so they tend not to go walk about once placed. It would take a lot to persuade me to try something else in the mini range. Size 3/8, 1/2 and 3/4 are the most useful sizes. The Metolius cams in the equivalent size 0, 1 and 2 have narrow heads, and have a nice solid feel about them too.

The happy medium: Ten years ago, the choice was simple. You either bought single axis Wild Country technical friends which were lighter, but had a narrower camming range and have been copied by several manufacturers, or you bought double axis Black Diamond Camalots, which were probably the heaviest units on the market, but had a 30% wider camming range. Perfect for the desperate lunge for the crack manoeuvre. Then everybody decided to make cams, and confusion reigned, as to what was best. There are adherents in all camps, but along came the new improved Camalots that were released this year. Black Diamond have worked hard to loose their heavy weight image, and the new range camalots are amazing. I saw the new size 4 and just had to have it. They now weigh in as much as the equivalent technical friends, so there is no excuse, they are simply the most gifted camming device on the market. Size 0.5 to 4 can't be beaten in this range. If you like gimics, and want totally fool proof sizing, I might as well mention the very novel Omega link cam with a 1:2.5 expansion ratio, available in two sizes, but the cost, \$87.50 each!

Bring out the big guns: Black Diamond Camalots ruled the big camming market for many years. Just when you thought Wild Country was dead and buried, they bounced back with vengeance, and brought out their #5 and #6 Friends, which left the opposition with mouths, wide open enough to swallow their products. The new Camalots have tried to take back lost ground in the 5 and 6 sizes, but for the same camming range they are still 40-60g heavier. With my unlimited budget, I would buy the #5 friend over the Camalot, it rocks. I thought about the #6 Friend which has an impressive camming range of 118 to 194mm, and decided that at more than half a kilo, if I ever needed one, I may as well take off my helmet, reverse the straps, and use it as a giant chock.

Carabiners

There are hundreds of choices on the market these days. The more expensive ones generally have a smoother action, seem less susceptible to gate flutter, and don't feel dodgy like some of the real cheapies out there. For me, the bottom line has become weight. OK, so 35g a biner compared to the standard 50g is not a big deal, about the weight of two and a half pencils, but think of it this way, 12 quickdraws, makes up 24 biners, plus one for each cam or hex or sling, and you are looking at about 40 biners on a medium size rack. That's 2kg of ironmongery you have to drag around. Take some of the new light weight slightly downsized alloy jobs, and you save 40x15g, that's 600g, 100 pencils or almost two beers. The theory is the easy part, the more difficult, is which one of these to choose. Going light weight, limits your choice of design, and budget. Bear in mind that these are always in the wire gate form, a feature that is still quite an issue for some climbers, who just don't like the look of them, and rumours of tangling gates, and gate flutter abound. In truth, the technology and manufacturing have improved, they do shave off a few grams, and although they don't look it, wire gates are as strong as solid gate openings. It is after all, the little wire catch inside the confidence boosting solid gate that does all the work under load. Trim it down, and you can refine it to a wire gate. With an unlimited budget, the Wild Country Helium at 33g is a full size super light marvel. If can't afford a rack of those, I would probably go for the smaller Camp Nano wire gate at an incredible 28g or the Trango Superfly Wiregate at 30g, also available in straight or bent gates (38g) for the anti-wire gate fans. The Black Diamond Neutrino comes in at 36g, and is available in all colours to match your cams: there are therapy groups for obsessive-compulsive people who actually like to match these things up.

As far as locking biners go, I still opt for the old fashioned screw gate type. For one, they tend to be cheaper, lighter, and more reliable than the spring twist variety. The only drawback, is that when you decide to give the screw an extra twist for safety half-way down an abseil. Surprise Surprise!!! The biner stretches under load, and springs back when you arrive at ground level. Now, try to untwist the gate without reloading the biner, and not even superman with a litre of Q20 can get it loose. Hang from it, and it comes loose easily: most climbers make this mistake only once.

Slings and webbing

The thin light weight nylon spectra/dyneema blends are the way to go, unless you like winter climbing, where a few meters of old style thick nylon webbing can double up as a scarf. Two long slings (120cm), 2-3 shorter slings (60cm), and a variety of length quickdraws 2X30cm, 2X25cm, 2X20cm, 3X15cm, 3X10cm should cover all situations. Just a note about the new material. It is much more slippery than nylon, and does not grip a rope like pure nylon, so don't think you can use them to double up as prussic loops. A long spectra cordelette is costly, but is very light and handy to have around.

So there you have it, a list of my favourite toys. Now if I were faced with the choice of working weekends to finance more cool gear, or simply go climbing on my old rack...hmmm...um ...cheers, I'm off to the hills.

7. PROPOSAL FOR DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Mountain Club of South Africa (MCSA) – Johannesburg Section

Background

The MCSA (Transvaal Section) was founded 75 years ago. Due to the segregation politics and laws in place at the time, the club has traditionally had very few members of colour. In the past decade since democracy, the demographic profile of the club has not changed. The reasons appear to be that there has not been specific activity to promote such membership, and given that the MCSA tends to operate on friendship circles, until such friendship circles (at an adult level) are truly integrated, the demographic change of the club will not happen naturally.

In addition to the desire by the committee to see greater breadth of interest in South Africa, there is also an implicit threat to a body seen as being predominantly white, and owning vast tracts of mountain land. The MCSA will battle to wield any significant weight in opinion if it does not represent a broader cross-section of South African society.

Objectives

The objectives of this policy include the following:

- To broaden the demographic membership of the group, specifically to include a significant representation of historically disadvantaged individuals.
- To increase the political clout of the MCSA through encouraging prominent Black individuals with a passion for mountains and conservation to join.
- To increase the level of interest among poor people of any race in mountains and their conservation.

Scope and duration

This policy is expected to be in force for three years and does not seek to address general membership concerns or entry requirements, but rather to achieve the objectives set out above in the context of membership initiatives. The document also does not address potential problems with farmers who may still be somewhat unconvinced of the new dispensation. This would have to be dealt with through land and access sensitively, otherwise one incident could undo months of hard work and divide the club.

Policy

The proposed policy addresses the three concerns that have been cited in trying to secure members of colour.

1. That poor people do not have the means to join the club financially
2. They also do not easily have the wherewithal (or think they don't have) to travel to club meets and mountain areas
3. Few influential Black people have an interest in outdoors, conservation and mountains

Specific programmes will be developed between Outreach, Training and Meets to ensure that individuals or groups that are identified, are mentored right through the process. It would be better to recruit 10 enthusiastic, well trained and committed individuals than 100 people with nothing better to do. This will hopefully form the core of the emergent generation of MCSA members. Potential black members are informally "screened" and only those that have been identified by the committee as requiring financial assistance receive such.

Membership fees currently consist of joining fees of R230 and annual subscriptions of R295. Identified participants in a development programme (or others that specifically approach the committee) will be sponsored half of their entry fees. Further, if a strong case exists, membership fees at the sole discretion of the Committee, may be paid over a period to be agreed.

Costings

Assuming that the club is able to recruit, say, 20 new members during 2005, the effective cost would be R260 times 20, or R5,200 for the year. Clearly this is a target which may well be stretched should our efforts to promote mountain and conservation interest be successful.

Means

The Committee has agreed to fund the "sponsorship" money out of club funds allocated to development. This "pot" is clearly limited and we should seek alternative funding sources.

Ian Buchel, 2 August 2005

Development Portfolio

8. NOT SO FAR AND AWAY PLACES

Climbing in Kwa-Zulu Natal

Members in the Northern Provinces tend to be spoiled with the variety of climbing and hiking available to them, but with this choice comes the problem of access, as most climbing areas are on private land, or far from the main centres. Kwa-Zulu Natal, on the other hand is known for its mild climate, easy access and great climbing and hiking weather all year round, and don't think there is no variety!

With easy access to SA's biggest mountains, the Drakensberg, there are great opportunities for hiking in really big mountains, and of course the excitement of climbing massive free standing peaks, not forgetting the ice climbing in winter. And for those who want something a little smaller and less committing, KZN also has some of the best rock in the country at various crags around the province. Be warned though, climbers used to Magaliesberg and Free State rock will generally find Natal rock harder at similar grades.

Monteseel is by far the oldest, and biggest climbing area in KZN, with over 300 documented routes on excellent Natal sandstone / quartzite. It dates back to the early 1940's when the first routes were climbed and saw the greatest activity in the mid to late 1970's. This is a Trad only area, although there are a few sport routes in the high grade end of the scale. There are moves afoot to equip some of the unused climbs with top chains so allowing top roping without the need of a Trad rack. Most routes are single pitch, but a number of excellent multi pitch routes are available. Climbing consists of well protected moves, usually between rails which are suitable for a wide range of gear. Most placements are bomber, so you can be assured of good pro.

Not far from Monteseel are a number of Sport climbing venues, Kloof Gorge, Shongweni, and Hilton are all very popular, and if you want to add in some game viewing in Zululand, a visit to White Umfolosi crag is a must.

Access at Monteseel is probably the easiest in the Province, with no permits necessary and with the crags being on public land there are no problems with landowners. This probably accounts for Monteseel's continued popularity even though there is a trend for Sport climbers to shy away from Monties, Trad climbers and sport climbers willing to top rope are still attracted. The security situation is very good with no reported problems over the last two years, however common sense must still prevail, and climbers should not leave gear unattended.

A mountain club success story of interest to climbers coming to KZN, is the conversion of the old MCSA Monteseel Hut to a climbing training centre and accommodation ideally situated 200m from the crag. This hut had fallen into desperate disrepair until taken over by Wildways Adventures and renovated to provide cost effective accommodation to climbers and hikers, close to the main climbing areas (200m). Dormitory accommodation for 11 as well as camping is available. A fully equipped kitchen and comfortable surrounds has turned this once overgrown property into an asset to climbing in KZN. The hut has been equipped with an indoor climbing wall and fixed Prussiking ropes for indoor training.

As of September 2005, the Wildways Climbers Inn will have a permanent guardian who will be available to guide those who would like to be looked after while at Monties. He will also be available for climbing courses if needed. It is still advisable to phone or email a booking through as the Inn is regularly fully booked with a course running for people gaining National Qualifications in mountaineering. For those not wanting to cook, the Hacienda is just around the corner offering good pub style meals, and Hillcrest is 20 minutes drive away with a huge variety of shops and restaurants. Other accommodation can be arranged through the Thousand Hills Tourism office on 031 777 1874.

The majority of climbs face North West so shade is minimal and usually only available in the early morning. Some shade can be found on the Western buttress, which have some of the less frequented but excellent climbs. The Eastern buttress is easily accessed via paths at the top and bottom of the crag or further out along the wall there are rap points down to a ledge and has a number of must do climbs; Granny's souped up wheel chair 24; Fallout 20; Fiddler in the roof 19 and Black Deirdre 14. Almost all climbs on the western buttress are accessed via rap points which holds one of Monteseel's classic multi pitch routes: Utopia, a must for every visitor and easy enough for all at 14.

Travelling time to Monteseel from JHB is about 4 hours down the N3 turning off at the Hammarsdale off ramp. Direction maps are available from Wildways. The great thing about Monteseel is its variety ranging from short easy climbs of 8 through to some technical challenges of 28. For online route guides to KZN climbing visit <http://kzn.mcsa.org.za/> and to contact the Inn at Monteseel email info@wildways.za.net or phone 031 767 2160. www.wildways.za.net.

9. CONSERVATION

Not for WIMPS

The first draft of the Drakensberg Management Plan and the Wilderness Management Plan (WIMP) has recently been released for public comment. The full document can be viewed on http://www.kznwildlife.com/PDF/wild_management.pdf. The closing date for public comments was 16 August. The KZN section was happy with the bulk of the proposed WIMP. However they had some reservations regarding the sections on Mountaineering and Mountain Rescue. The main concern was the section on mountaineering. "*Mountaineering is compatible with Wilderness principles. Fixed anchors³, however, are not acceptable in Wilderness areas. Removable anchors such as slings, cams, nuts and other temporary devices, may be used provided they are removed after the climb. The proliferation of fixed anchors erodes the Wilderness and the uncertainty inherent to Wilderness climbing. Existing fixed anchors in the Wilderness are allowed to remain but no new impact will be allowed unless they are required for an emergency rescue. Existing anchors may not be replaced, in the Wilderness, if they disappear.*"

The KZN section has responded on the following grounds: This paragraph shows a complete lack of understanding of rock climbing in the Drakensberg and it is unfortunate that the MCSA was not consulted on these issues before this was drafted. The extreme fragile nature of the rock often excludes the use of "cams, nuts and other temporary devices". Without the use of fixed pegs, virtually every rock climbing route in the Drakensberg would become too dangerous

to contemplate. Inadequate protection is one of the leading causes of injuries and fatalities in climbing. Climbers must retain the discretion to determine what forms of protection to use – including the use of fixed climbing safety anchors – to protect themselves while climbing in wilderness areas.

We strongly disagree with the comment that a fixed anchor erodes the Wilderness. If one is to create "uncertainty" in Wilderness climbing, then route descriptions should not be permitted!! This paragraph will also ban the opening of new climbing routes. Opening a new climbing route is by far the greatest Wilderness challenge that exists in the Drakensberg.

Since the Drakensberg basalt is eroding away at a rapid rate, existing "anchor" positions will gradually disappear. However new fixed anchor placement positions will most likely appear. To prohibit the replacement of these anchors is to effectively phase out rock climbing in the future. Since everything above the 2400 contour, other than the Sani Corridor, is classified as Primitive Wilderness, the entire Central and Southern Drakensberg will be excluded from the use of fixed anchors.

The club's vision for climbing in Drakensberg management plan is most likely to follow similar lines to those which were drawn up for the Cape Cederberg, which essentially promotes a compromise between permissible climbing activities, and controls to prevent environmental degradation. The Cederberg plan can be viewed at: <http://alewis.its.uct.ac.za/mcsa/other/Cederberg-Management-Plan-17.6.2005.pdf>.

10. MEMBERSHIP NEWS

NewMembers: Robert & Cherie Stewardson, Richard Douglas, Barbara Abdinor, Karl Vieth, Susanne Fortina, Shaun Hope, Sandy Cundill, Bruce Arnett, Nigel Bailes, Bryan Meenehan (junior membership), Leigh-Anne Cundill & Zennan Magg – family membership.

Reinstated: Gerhard Benade, Margi & Mark Lawrence.

Resigned: Dale Heyne.

Congratulations! Harry Barker on his 98 birthday.

11. CLUB NEWS

Johannesburg Section's 75th anniversary project

The following are ideas:

1. We are hoping to compile a 'book' 75 years of the history of the Jhb section. We would like members to contribute to this important book. Please let us have your experiences, expeditions, happenings that would be of interest to the history of our section. Photos are also needed. Please get writing so that this project can get going. If members are able to assist with researching and editing these articles please contact Uschi 011 807 1310 on weekdays.
2. Dinner Dance and Annual MCSA Dinner in May with special guest speaker.
3. An International Expedition in 2006.
4. Special meet in SA, probably local.
5. Other events like slide shows, or bring & braai.

Members who have any other ideas or would like to help with these celebrations can contact Barbara 083 702 0530 or Uschi 011 807 1310, or e-mail to admin@jhb.mcsa.org.za or send to our P.O. Box 1641 Houghton 2041.

Veterans Meets: Easterkloof. 25th September 2005. A special invitation goes to our veteran members to join us on this meet. Please contact Margaret Hammond-Tooke: 011 888 3883.

BANFF film festival: the Jhb screening has been cancelled ☹

Island Style: On the 21st of September, Greg Hofmeyr will be giving a slide show on Bouvet Island. The island is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's most isolated island. This Norwegian possession lies in the Southern Ocean approximately midway between South Africa, South America and Antarctica.

Some 97 % of the island is covered in glaciers and, while most of the unglaciated coastline consists of cliffs, a small and relatively flat coastal platform known as Nyroysa also exists. This platform is home to large numbers of seabirds and seals. Beginning in the 1996/97 summer a series of four combined Norwegian-South African expeditions visited the island to conduct biological research. Each expedition remained on the island for between two and four months. I was privileged to take part in three of these trips. During the slide show I will talk about my visits to the island, and the work that was done there. Also to be mentioned is the island's highest peak, which is, as yet unclimbed.

Transantarctic – Shackleton: We are hoping to have a screening of the DVD "Transantarctic – Shackleton" sometime in November.

Wednesday Night Club Evenings: If you have done anything exciting, or have awesome slides, or know of anybody who is interested in presenting something at the club evenings, we would be delighted to hear from you. Go wild, travel destinations, conservation, beer tastings, birding, photography, endolithic algae, anything you think that may be of interest to members, please volunteer. We don't always want to see pictures of scary looking rock and ice!

First aid course: If anybody is interested in doing a first aid course for the first time, or would like to upgrade their existing qualification, please contact Roland Magg. Based on numbers and interest, the club will try to organise suitable times at discounted rates.

Conservation Snippet: 'It is a good idea to have a small pair of wire cutters in your backpack when you are walking or climbing in the Magaliesberg. You can then use them to destroy wire snares that you might find along your way.' I guess you can also move the snare to head height, and try to catch the poacher ☹.

12. MCSA NEWS

MCSA Super Tramp award for youth expeditions 2006

A generous sponsorship of up to R12,000.- by an anonymous donor is available for a youth expedition by South African mountaineers in 2006. The sponsorship will be awarded under the auspices of the Mountain Club of South Africa (Magaliesberg Section). Applicants not necessarily MCSA members, must be younger than 25 by the 31st December 2005, and all participating expedition members must be younger than 25. The award will be made to a single person, whether or not the expedition team comprises two (or many) young South African mountaineers. Preference will be given to originality as well as to first ascents and/or unusual/remote destinations. See: http://mcsa.org.za/main/g_youth/guidelines/guidelines.htm

For an information sheet and an application form, or contact Petro Grobler (supertramp@mcsa.org.za; 012-809 1022). The D-date for applications is the 30th of November 2005.

MCSA Calendars: 2006 single page calendars will be available from end September. Price R30. Contact Uschi/Jenny.