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We have good news: The Sentinel Peak Chain Ladders that are used to access the Amphitheatre route to Tugela Falls from Sentinel Car Park are going to be replaced with newly constructed ladders. This is happening because the engineers involved in the rehabilitation of the pathways have concerns about the safety of the current ladders. Time, weather and many thousands of hikers have taken their toll on the metal construction and it's time to replace them before there is a problem. A complete new build has been chosen because the professional view is that repairs will not be good enough, and that the safety of hikers cannot be compromised.

This project is being managed by the Department of Environmental Affairs, and we commend their project team for reacting fast once the engineer's report was received, and changing the project plans to prioritize the ladder replacement. They will be removing the existing ladders and carrying all the metal off the mountain. New ladders will then be constructed and installed at the same site.

During the removal and construction period the GULLY will be open for hikers who want to climb to the top of the Amphitheatre and see the top of Tugela Falls. Samson, the head guide from Witsieshoek, has marked a safe path up and down the gully with yellow spray-paint. A cairn has been built at the top of the gully, also marked with yellow paint, to guide hikers to the access point for the downward route. Since Samson did the marking, many hikers have used the gully route, and are happy with its accessibility and safety.

Now to the million-dollar question: when will the new ladders be in place? The project team have told us that they are aiming for the end of May 2018. However, we all understand that there are many variables, not the least being the weather, that can impact that date. Please be assured that everyone wants the fastest possible turnaround, so there is full support for getting new ladders into place as fast as safely possible.

In summary: Hikers going up from Sentinel Car Park to access the top of the Amphitheatre will, with immediate effect, only have access to the gully until new ladders are in place. The route is open, and there is no need for any change of plans.

For any further information please contact the manager of Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge, Jan van Niekerk on 058-713-6361/2