

NATIONAL NEWSLETTER – MAY 2021

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1. PREAMBLE

This is not a “normal” National Newsletter. As retiring President, I am invoking executive privilege, to make a personal statement about the Club and the joy that I have got out of being a part of it. I trust that I will be forgiven for this indulgence.

2. MCSA NATIONAL AGM

The Mountain Club of South Africa is pleased to announce that the Annual Meeting for 2021 will take place on **17 April 2021 at 9:00 am**. In order to reduce the risk and avoid unnecessary travel, this year’s meeting will be a “virtual” meeting (via a Zoom link – to be made available) as was the 2020 meeting which went off very well.

For those members who are unaware of the protocols around this meeting, it is structured in two parts:

- **The Annual General Meeting** – is the “formal” procedural part and deals with the necessary “routine” business. This involves the financial report(s), the election of the office bearers for the forthcoming year and any business of a more general nature not dealt with by the National Committee Meeting which follows (see below). Any member in good-standing may attend this meeting. It is generally very short, about 20 minutes, and quite formal.

The office-bearers are elected by the sections and the nominations this year are:

President:	Mr Paul Carstensen
Treasurer:	Mr Lester Coelen
Secretary:	Mrs Jennifer Paterson

While Jenny and Lester are well known to Club members, Paul may be less well-known outside of Jo’burg and Cape Town. His (abbreviated) CV follows:

“Paul was born in 1961 and is married to Caryn (a teacher). They have two children, Rowan (a mechanical engineer) and Kimberlee (an attorney) who are both in the UK, and members of the MCSA.

Paul joined the Johannesburg section through the Scouting Association in 1992, and after climbing with Mike Scott and David Davies, the Cape Town section in 1998. Paul has served on numerous Johannesburg committees/sub-committees, as treasurer (albeit under the watchful eye of Uschi Magg) Meets (initially with Porky Harris), Expeditions (with Ulrike Kiefer), Library, Land and Access and Vice Chair, but mostly, in the legal portfolio.

Paul has climbed mainly in the Magaliesberg, but led a team of 1st Edenvale Scouts Kilimanjaro, in 1995. In 1999, Paul and Peter Lazarus, led a MCSA expedition mostly of Johannesburg and Cape Town members, to Mt Kenya. Most of Paul’s climbing in the Drakensberg, was with Greg Devine and Darryl Margetts, but many easier peaks and more horrible passes were bagged with the Rover Scouts.

Paul is a senior advocate at the Johannesburg Bar, a qualified mediator, and arbitrator, his other sports are superbike circuit racing and rowing (note: no games)".

- **The National Committee (“NatComm”) meeting** – this is the annual get-together of the chairs of all the Sections of the Club and deals with any business of a “national” nature. Any and all issues may be discussed and decisions taken according to the voting protocol in place – which weights the voting by the number of sections and the number of members of each section. Only the chairs of the sections (or their nominees) may attend this meeting plus any invited guests who may contribute to particular discussions.
 - Sections are reminded to please ensure that their Annual Reports are sent to the secretary as soon as possible after their AGMs.
 - Equally, the national sub-committee reports are requested ASAP.

Formal Agendas for both meetings will be sent out in due course.

3. PRESIDENT’S VALEDICTORY

It is the custom in the Alpine Club for the “retiring” President to pen some words as a valedictory upon stepping down as President. While our great Club is not perhaps quite as august as the Alpine Club and this retiring president certainly not in the same league as the AC presidents, I hope that I may be allowed to have the last say of my presidency here upon these pages.

It has been a complete and utter privilege to be able to serve this Club as President over the last few years. My climbing journey has now been going on for over 60 years and the MCSA has been a great part of that journey. The Club has given me far more than I have been able to contribute – and it continues to give! The President-elect – if I may call him that - sent me a text message last week that sums up one very small facet of Club membership. He said “I think we pay bargain basement prices for membership”. And that is entirely true! But we also need to think like JFK – to paraphrase – ask not what your Club can do for you, ask what you can do for your Club...

It is an unfortunate fact that organisations the world over that rely on volunteers putting in time and effort are suffering from the same malaise. Call it burn-out, shortened attention span, too much screen time on (anti-)social media. Call it what you will, but we battle to find the people to run this organisation. But – cometh the hour, cometh the (wo)man – we do tend to find the right people in the right place at the right time!

While I have been climbing for over 60 years, inevitably I am slowing down. [Some would say that I have slowed down!] But, thankfully, I can still get out into the hills and enjoy them just as I did all those years ago. Different, but still immensely satisfying. I have always considered the mountains to be a way of life for me – not a sport or a past-time – and that is still the case. In difficult circumstances, getting out into the hills always settles the mind and the heart and allows one to renew the battles refreshed and invigorated!

The “undiscovered country” has always fascinated me. It has largely guided where I have “expeditioned” (if I may invent a word) and to an extent it still does. Over the years, I have had many ideas for real expeditions (meaning to remote and challenging areas but not necessarily technically difficult), and I hope to continue challenging younger members to actually get out there and do it! We are in the (somewhat slow) process of getting a trip to relatively unexplored part of Chilean Patagonia, jointly with the New Zealand Alpine Club.

The pandemic has slowed progress but we hope to get this off the ground sooner rather than later.

The undiscovered country is of course, largely in the mind. This was brought home to me by the initiative of the recent (in Cape Town) trad rock meet. This was held in the old style with multiple leaders climbing multiple routes with less experienced people – even total beginners! This was just like the rock meets of yesteryear when, on occasion we would have over 100 people on such a meet. Maybe that is not to be encouraged but this one was, by all accounts, a huge success. How is that undiscovered country? Well, it opened the eyes of a number of people to the joys and beauty of trad rock climbing. What the late Doug Scott termed “adventure climbing” – a very good name!

Back in the day – I am allowed to reminisce at my age and stage – trad was the only game in town for rock climbers and we made full use of the fact that there was just so much to do! Even average climbers could get the adventure out of adventure climbing. My regular partner in those days was Andy K, and we figured after exam time at UCT, we were going to be in bad climbing shape and we were going to battle on whatever we climbed so we may as well do something hard (for us) and struggle. And, if we were going to do that, we might as well battle on a new route! Which is how some pretty nice routes – if I say so myself – actually got done!

While the more popular areas might be the home ground of the better climbers, it is surprising how many potential good routes are out there for climbers of more modest abilities. Just go for it!!

Over the years, I have been privileged to climb and associate with a large number climbers, a lot of them a lot better than me! They know who they are and thankfully, many of them are still with us. And I thank them for their patience and forbearance! I have also had the immense privilege of hard country trips in South Africa and expeditions to foreign lands – also with people I have been privileged to call my friends. Some of them have parted from us along the way and while I mourn them, I also celebrate their lives and the impact that they had on mine...

Finally – thank goodness, I hear you say! – in terms of the Club. I am immensely pleased that I have been able to contribute. And, as with my climbing partners and friends, I have known and worked with many outstanding individuals. The current executive members of the National Committee are a valid case in point. Let us support them in their continuing endeavours to keep this great club up there encouraging the exploration of the undiscovered country.

And lastly, but absolutely not leastly, my thanks and love go to my wife (of 51 years) who has suffered my habits and foibles with enormous courage and love. I could not have done anything I have done without her.

QUOTABLE QUOTES:

As above:

“Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country”

John F Kennedy