

MHC – Injisuthi, Marble Baths Hike 19-20 September 2015

Injisuthi, and in particular Marble Baths, is one of my favourite hiking destinations as you can swim in the natural "super tube" and lie and bake in the sun on the warm rocks, unfortunately this was not going to be the case, and with two caves to choose from, the main cave, large and open, and the annex a short distance away, a smaller more cosy cave. I have seldom hiked in the Injasuthi area without encountering bad weather, so, as the day dawned, gloomy, rainy and cold, even the weather forecast did not look too great for the rest of the weekend either, but there was a small chance that the clouds would clear and that is all a hiker needs to convince him that it would be worth the effort. We were all to meet at the Injisuthi car park and as we all started to arrive I could spot a few inquiring faces looking at me as they reluctantly got out of from the warmth of their cars, and I could feel the question being asked - "are you really wanting to walk in this weather?" Sleeping in Marble Baths Cave Annex will mean we will be dry, snug and out of the wind and rain.

The walk to Marble Baths is about 7,5km, not a long walk, however the up hills do make it a bit more challenging, especially in wet conditions. We needed to give ourselves about 5 hours to reach the cave as some members might need a few more rest breaks on the up hills. In clear weather you will be blessed with awesome views of the peaks and turning into the valley where Marble Baths Cave lies in, you are greeted with a view of the Old Woman Grinding Corn and the Ape and as you round the corner Leslie's Pass lies before you. There was a small chance of snow forecasted for Saturday night and we were all hoping for a white blanket over the peaks on Sunday morning – unfortunately it did not materialize.

After checking gear and doing the necessary paper work, we set off down the tar road to the start of the trail. A number of hikes start from this point and then branch off to whatever destination you had planned for. Some of our team members were struggling, so we took it slow and easy so that we could all keep up with each other and not get separated. There is always the danger that when you are separated from the rest of the group you might get lost or worse get injured and not be able to let the rest of the group know that you are having a problem. So stay together it might save your life especially in misty wet conditions.



The Injisuthi River's water level was still low and we could negotiate over it without getting wet and it was just a matter of keeping our balance over the wet rocks. Even with all the rain we had, the water level of the rivers did not seem to rise much although we did find a lot more streams with water that might not have been the case a month ago.



The clouds were still heavy and dark and as we reached about the halfway mark the mist and rain returned and this would carry on for the rest of the trip to the cave. After crossing the river and entering the Marble Bath valley, we found ourselves an overhang, where we could get out of the rain and enjoy some well earned lunch. Lunch always makes a bad situation better, this was no exception. We had a tough climb waiting for us that would take us to the cave's level and this would take a lot out of the slower walkers but thereafter it is fairly level and the promise of warmth and dry clothing spurred us all on to reach the cave. There was an impressive rock formation as we reached a small neck, which reminded us of the Iron Man keeping watch over us as we made our way up the valley.

Before long we came around the corner and the cave was just above us and the final climb took us right into it. After settling in, 3 of us set off to fetch some water that is quite a distance away down

in the valley and it is a good idea to take a 5l wine sack to collect water for the night. The path down is steep and slippery and we had to be extra careful when we went down and back up again especially with

our precious cargo of water for the whole group.

Marble Baths main cave is a big open cave with very little protection against the wind, and the main sleeping area is to the right of the cave. Unfortunately the sleeping area is slowly disintegrating, but still can sleep 5 to 6 people with ease. Now the Annex is a different cave altogether, much lower and more protected from the wind and rain and can sleep 8 comfortably and 10 at a squeeze. The one side is a bit low, and if you are sleeping on that side, beware of jumping up at night,



you will come of second best in the encounter with a cave roof.

With the unfortunate bad weather, we could not go swimming, and most of the group was already in their sleeping bags way before sleeping time and the rest of us stood around chatting and reminiscing about our younger days and what we got up to. It is always a good idea to bring a deck of playing cards with as you never know if you will need to keep the group busy when the weather turns nasty. As the afternoon turned into evening we could feel the temperature dropping and it was a great time to start with supper. No



matter how hard the day was, after a good supper and a full tummy you are ready for bed and when it is cold you don't need too much of an invitation to get into a warm sleeping bag and doze off into a peaceful sleep. As everyone finished off supper and slowly got into bed, the surroundings got quiet and it was only the peaceful breathing that filled the air with the occasional rustling of a sleeping bag every now and again as they turned around. It was still dripping outside but we were warm and dry and that was all that mattered to the tired bodies all lying next to each other like sardines in a can. It was surprisingly warm during the night and only during the early morning hours did it become a bit chilly and as I readjusted my sleeping bag I could see the clouds lift and some stars were out and I was beginning to regain my trust in the weather service. Unfortunately when we woke up the mist had managed to creep in again and our hopes were a bit dashed as we were looking forward to some warmth

after the constant cold and rain of the past few days.

We packed up, had breakfast and on leaving the cave and rejoining the path, the mist started lifting over the peaks and we were blessed with some impressive views of the peaks and mist swirling around them. Charlie and Kate made good use of this time to snap a last winning photo for the photo competition before we made our way back down the valley and back to civilization. With the sun now peaking through the clouds it turned out to be a nice warm day, ideal for hiking in after the last days wet rainy conditions, it goes to show that you can actually never be too prepared for what the Berg's weather is going to do. One day it will be boiling hot, the next day icy cold, so come prepared for all 4 seasons.

We snaked our way back down the valley, enjoying the warmth of the sun, taking in the splendour of our surroundings and the view of the escarpment inviting us to come visiting again. Crossing the Injisuthi River for the last time reality began to sink in that it was time to return home, and for some of us a long drive back home and civilization lay before us.

No matter how tired and painful you feel after the hike, it is the memories and the bragging rights you have to share with friends and family that last for years to come and even though we said our goodbyes, we know that it is never forever, because we will see each other somewhere and some time again in the mountains doing what we love to do – spending time in the Berg and building new friendships and renewing old ones.

