

Aasvoelskrans - Highmoor



*Beginners Hike * 2 - 3rd April 2016 * led by Katy Hart*

Jerry, Ansie and Bibi met Charlie and I at the Highmoor office at 8h30 ready for their first overnight cave hike. Before setting off, some adjustments had to be made to Jerry's bag which seemed considerably off-balance and was in fact a little too small for his height. (Always a good idea to ask for advice from the staff when purchasing items for hiking – from experience, Bush & Bundu are very helpful).



After signing in and a quick overview of the hike, we set off at a leisurely pace. The weather was cool and overcast; thankfully dry but a pity that the Giant couldn't be seen under his blanket of clouds. I had intended to deviate from the path to view the waterfall just prior to the bridge crossing, only a massive troop of baboons had already laid claim to the area so we moved off



quickly with their challenging barks echoing behind us. A short stop at the river for a rest and sip of juice and off again to the 'lunch spot' just off the path descending to the cave. As it only took us 1½ hr to get there it was a bit early for lunch, so we opted for a light snack and sit-down to enjoy the views.



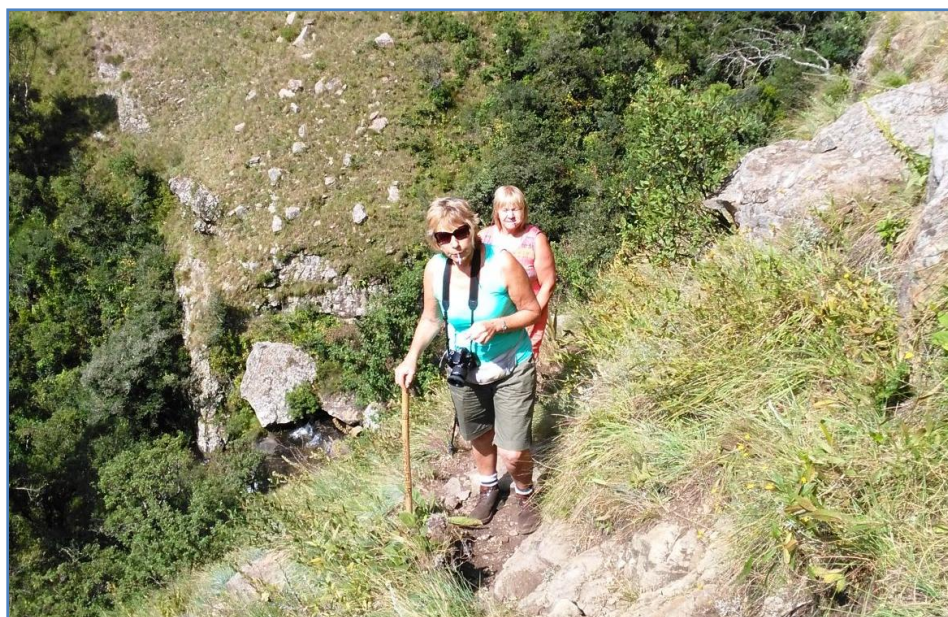
Although the cave is named after the vulture, there were none to be seen and it was up to the murder of crows to entertain us; swooping and gliding with the gusts of wind, showing off the benefit of being winged.



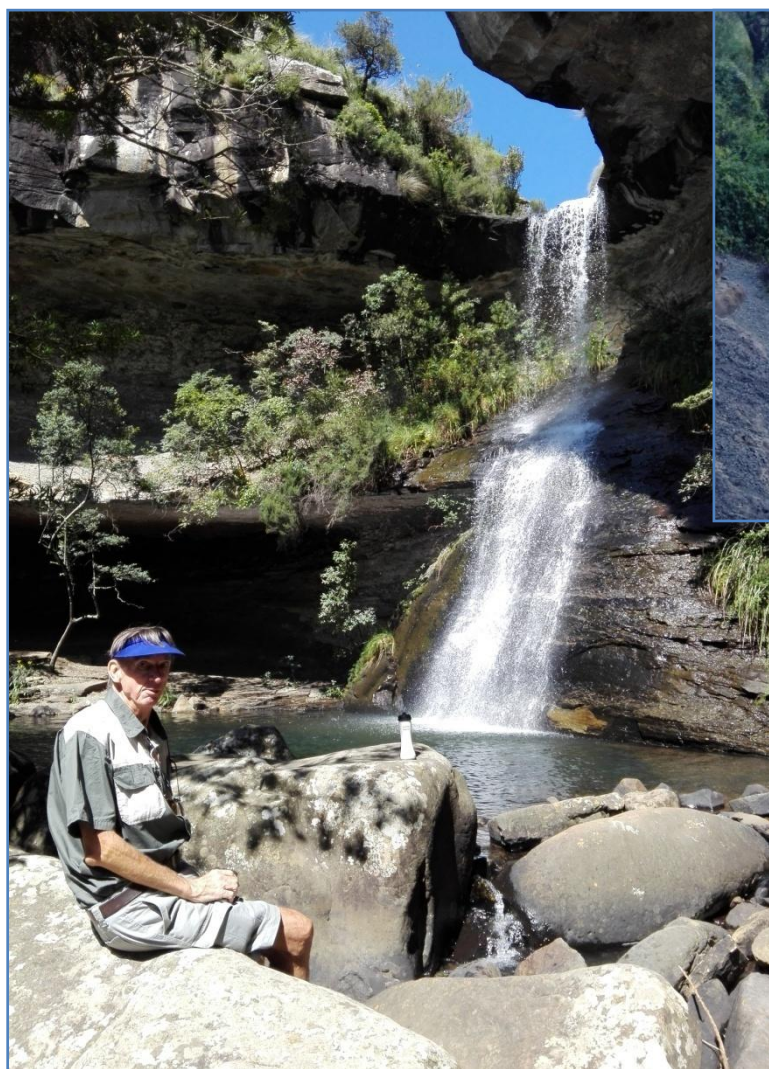
Unfortunately the stone directing us to the upper and lower caves had been shoved down the bank (baboons or people?), but it was easy enough to find our way to the top floor where we posed for some photos with the heart shaped rock I had picked up earlier off the path. Thereafter we made our way down to our less rocky sleeping abode below.



After lunch, Ansie, Bibi and I re-laced our boots and set off for a short exploration whilst the boys guarded camp. We followed the path leading below the earlier 'lunch spot', which slowly dissipates, leaving us only vague animal tracks to follow, heading towards a cave housing a few, rather faded San rock-art images, but still worth the effort.



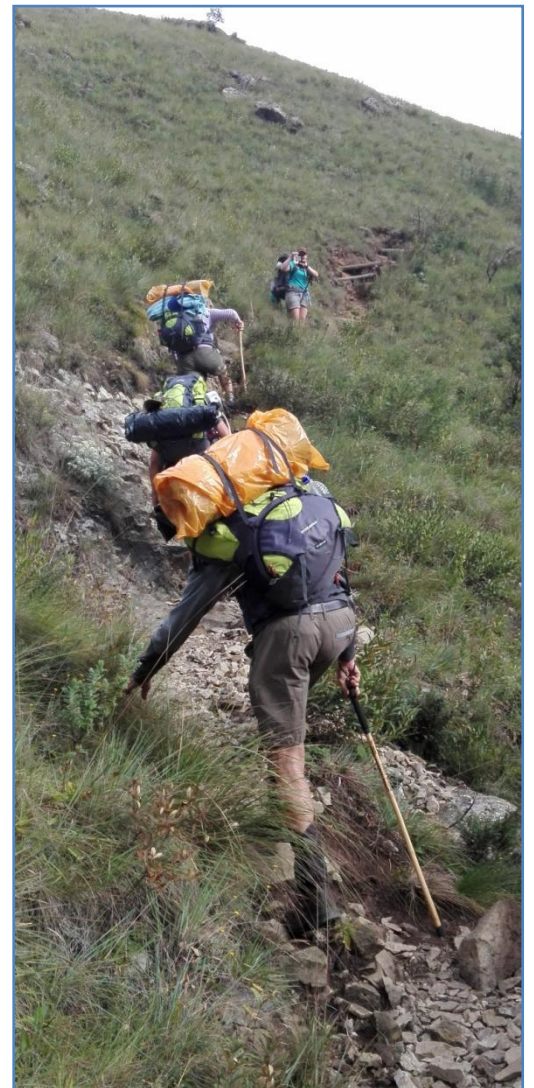
By this time the sun had shown an appearance, and we were sufficiently sweaty enough to warrant a cool down in the pools below the cave. The water was surprisingly warm considering the somewhat overcast weather – though by warm I mean a few degrees above freezing. It was here that we spent the last few hours of sunlight before heading back up to feed our grumbling bellies.





Nothing like a hot dinner and glass of wine while watching the sun slowly disappear behind the mountains before curling up for a good (?) night's sleep.

Being a late riser, I can't account for any activity until at least 7h30, when finally my full bladder forced me out of hibernation. After a quick breakfast we packed up, double checked no litter left behind, and started along the path climbing back up the hill. I raced ahead to get photos of those below me as they summited, only to have my camera fail me at the top! What a waste of energy! After a short breather to replenish the oxygen and calm the heart rate, a slow pace was set heading back home. We passed the same solitary blesbok as the previous day, his interest in us still limited to the occasional glance in our direction, otherwise unperturbed.





Last stop before home with the baboons nowhere in sight, we dropped our packs and headed for the spectacular views into the valley. I was extremely chuffed to see Bibi conquering her fear of heights, in the very same spot I'd persevered the jelly-legs some years back! And that is what I love most about hiking... encouraging others to push themselves, face their fears and experience the awe of nature. Thanks guys and gals for joining me!

– Photos courtesy of Ansie, Charlie and myself.

