

Blinkwater Trail Hike

Hike led by John Fourie < > Report by Katy Hart



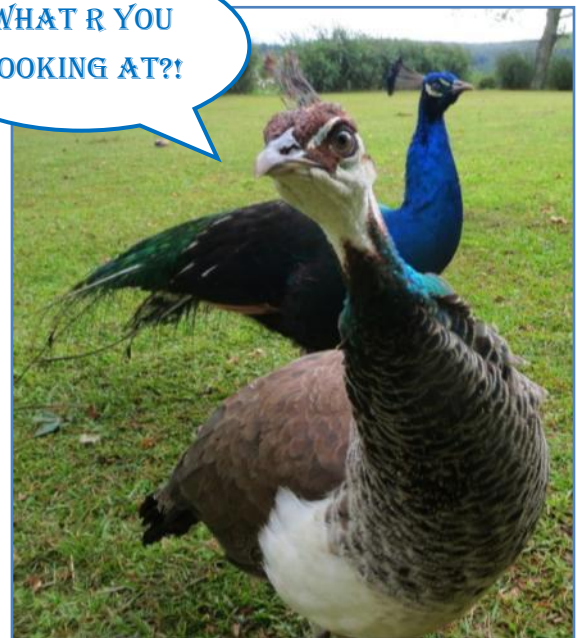
Lynda, Eric, Jo, Paul, Katy, John, Jason, Natasha and two pretty peacocks!

7 of us hikers met bright and early in Howick and after quick introductions set off in transit to the Blinkwater Trail. Here we met up with Natasha who lives on the property with her mom, a muster of screaming peacocks, a braying donkey, two yapping dogs and two beautiful (and thankfully silent) cows. It was a very warm welcome from them all!

The entire hike is marked with blue poles and material markers at regular intervals as John advised that the area is prone to thick mist and the paths can get quite overgrown at times. We start off along a dirt track heading into a forested area, dense with bracken. It isn't long until we reach what John deems 'the house of ill-repute', a long abandoned cottage of which only the framework and a few tiles remain whilst nature takes over. A lovely backdrop for some photos!



WHAT R YOU
LOOKING AT?!



It's a short pull through the forest before reaching a clearing which requires a further push upwards. Our efforts were immediately rewarded at the top where we could see for miles, including the considerably empty Albert Falls dam. We dropped our packs for a snack and to enjoy the view until the chilly wind picked up and got us moving again. Following the signboard to Douglas Smith cottage the path led us along a forest edge, through a patch of



mating grasshoppers (all dressed up for the occasion), before dipping into the shady forest undergrowth.



The bulk of the hike is through this forested area which is perfect for keeping you cool, and the twisted branches, assorted fungi and luscious groundcover is most fascinating. I have always found a forest to be quite magical and this one certainly doesn't disappoint! Another amusing side of trekking through mulching leaves and damp soil is the number of wipe-outs... I think Lynda won this one!

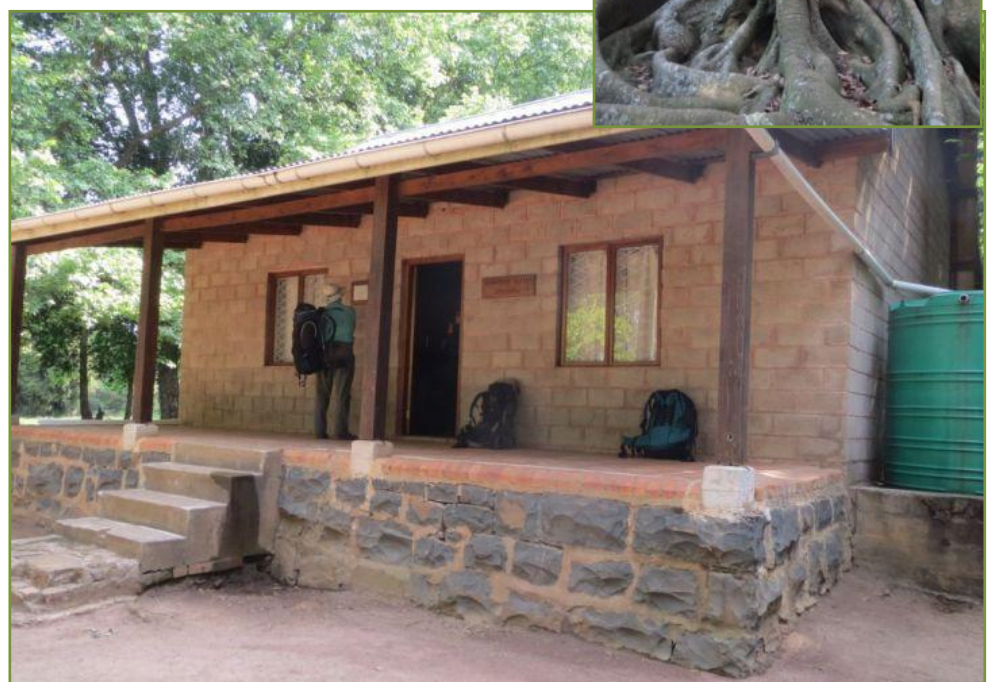


A few more slips and slides down the increasingly angled slopes, along some twisty paths and finally we found our lunch spot. With very little sunlight penetrating the canopy, wet bottoms were unavoidable, but we were grateful for the rest and a chance to feed the grumbling bellies. We had some good chuckles while we ate and I was fortunate to have a cup of tea freshly brewed for me, as in his haste for a good cup of coffee Paul hadn't thought of the consequences of opening his non-resealable milk carton! After lunch, it was a short climb out of the forested area and up onto a grassy plain, again with great views and only a short distance from our destination. A great natural marker is what I named Pimple Hill - a rather unique tree covered knoll which overlooks the cottage.



We pushed on past an old cattle kraal ruin built from heavy blocks, which John pointedly remarked must have been quite a feat getting them there without the modern machinery of today.

It does baffle the mind what humans were capable of before our dependence on technology; and here I am believing that my ability to carry 10kgs on my back in a pack designed specifically for such a purpose is a triumph! I was further humbled when we approached Enid Blyton's 'faraway tree'. What a specimen of nature before us! And right on the doorstep of the cottage... well almost!





We dropped our bags inside and pulled straws (or in this case plant seeds) for the double bed (which I won!). I was surprised to find the donkey boiler burning within minutes, and then noted that the cottage comes with its own caretaker. And, while relaxing in the branches of the magic tree, a sudden jet of water shoots up in the air - I thought the geyser was exploding but Natasha just laughed, and advised that the hot water is ready!

The hut has a little coal stove in the kitchen and two super comfy couches in the lounge, so it really was quite luxurious for me as I'm used to roughing it in a cave! We spent the rest of the afternoon relaxing by the fire in the lounge and then moved to the outside fireplace to throw some meat on the braai. It was a great evening of anecdotes and laughter until the drizzle came down and sent us all scuttling inside and to bed.



The next morning was unfortunately overcast and misty, though thankfully the rain held out until we'd reached the top of the steep climb, whereafter we all voted to take the shortcut home. Thanks John for leading us on this super hike!

