



Steady Plus

DRAKENSBERG HIGH



This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.



Fine view towards the Amphitheatre

- **Invigorating day walks, 5-7 hours, most days**
- **2 longer days to climb Cathedral and Rhino's peaks!**
- **Comfortable valley-based accommodation and good food**
- **Long established itinerary**
- **South African Autumn and Spring, the best walking seasons.**
- **Meeting local people interludes**

Drakensberg

'The Dragon Mountains' – the most widely known name for this mountain range. The Zulu's have the most romantic name of **Ukhahlamba** – the Barrier of Spears. The Basotho people know them as the **Dilomo tsa Natala** – the Cliffs of Natal.

This is the tenth season running our popular 'Drakensberg' trip.

The Trip

The Drakensberg or Ukhahlamba or 'Barrier of Spears' is the greatest mountain range in southern Africa with several summits over 3000m. The walking is magnificent and the contrast between big mountain days, comfortable nights and a systematic north-south exploration of the range make this itinerary second to none. We also take advantage of the highest road to penetrate the 'Berg to reach Sani Pass and stay at the highest accommodation in South Africa. We walk to a fine site of remarkable 'rock art' by the San people at Giant's Castle where we also climb high to the Langalibalele pass. In the northern 'Berg we have the classic finale of Cathedral Peak and the Sentinel/Mont aux Sources massif. By visiting several parts of the 'Berg' we will appreciate the contrasting features, moods and beauty of this spectacular range over 180 km long.

Our grading for the walking is at the top end of 'Steady plus.' Rhino and Cathedral peaks are both long 'up and down' days in excess of 8 hrs. Elsewhere good 5-7 hour days often with 500m plus ascents up along broad open ridges or on tracks threading steeply up through weaknesses in the escarpment cliffs. There are a couple of scrambly and exposed sections including an 80-100 ft steel ladder climb however with the exception of Cathedral Peak (see itinerary description) the summit of which is optional, there is nothing to deter the competent and sure-footed hill walker.

Off the mountains there are few hardships with comfortable chalet type accommodation and good food.

Wildlife

We have not included visits to Game Reserves, which generally are outside the Drakensberg area. Nevertheless we hope to see antelope, zebra, baboons and a range of birds incl eagles and a range of birds in their natural habitats on the Drakensberg escarpment.

The Hluhluwe-Umfolosi Game Reserve north of Durban has had good reports and features 2-3 day walking safaris



Approaching Cathedral Peak

Seasons and climate

The trip occurs in the South African Spring (Sept) and Autumn (May). This is the recognised walking season in the Drakensberg (although we rarely see anyone else) and the days are usually warm and pleasant with midday temperatures around 20°C. The normal walking attire is shorts or lightweight trousers, thin thermal top or T shirts and carrying fleeces and windproofs.

Accommodation

The accommodation is excellent. We stay in a range of park and reserve lodges, bungalows or chalets usually (but not always) offering twins or doubles, sometimes en-suite, often with cosy log fires. At the Mweni (Zulu) Centre on Day 9 we stay in comfortable but simple 4 bed Rondavels. (traditional round cabin)

Food

All but a few meals are included. Most of the time, the accommodations are self-catering and while we plan, buy and cook the meals, we ask the group to help with some of the chores, packed lunches etc. Whilst driving between walking areas or in towns it is sometimes easier and better to buy your own lunch snack at cafés or service areas. This will amount to a maximum of 4 lunches and might typically cost between ZAR30-60. Local beers and wine are inexpensive.

Transport

Our own private vehicles are used throughout.

Leaders

The trips are capably led by our colleagues from Natal province who know the Drakensberg intimately. They are registered with the South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism as specialist mountain walking guides. We may also include one of our own High Places staff.

Language

Most of the trip will be in Kwa-Zulu Natal. On top of the escarpment, Sani Pass for example, we may also enter the kingdom of Lesotho. Languages most likely to be encountered are English, Afrikaans and Zulu.



Didima Chalets

DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. As with all travel in mountain areas, weather and local conditions can lead to changes in our daily plans. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. breakfast, lunch, dinner. Other meals are at your own expense.

This trip is 12 days ex DURBAN. The first and last days refer to the days of arrival and departure to/from DURBAN and may not be the days you depart from or arrive back home.

- DAY 1 **Arrive Durban.** We drive straight out of the city on the fast dual carriageway towards Johannesburg catching a glimpse of Durban's superb seaside location. We turn off the highway after Pietermaritzburg and head west along rural roads towards the southern 'Berg. The serrated profile of the Drakensberg escarpment along the horizon adds to the excitement. Bungalows/chalets. (D)
- DAY 2 **Garden Castle** is the southernmost Park Reserve of the 'Berg and a good place to start. We plan an easy introductory day with a choice of attractive hikes along the valleys under the main escarpment. A first chance also to view tomorrow's objective, Rhino's Peak. 4 hours. 7-9kms. (B,L,D)
- DAY 3 **Rhino's Peak:** We need to be away soon after 7am - an early start for a tough day. Rhino's Peak (3051m) is one of those peaks which demand to be climbed. An attractive broad valley at first, narrowing to a rocky gully leading out onto the top of the escarpment. The summit, the Rhino's horn, (Ntabancobo), extends out along a narrow ridge and provides a dramatic finale. 8-9 hours. (B,L,D)
- DAY 4 **Sani Pass:** where a historic road climbs over the rim of the Drakensberg escarpment and into landlocked Lesotho, formerly Basutoland. Once a rough mule trail it is now a challenging 4WD road and we change to a vehicle to suit. There is quite a story behind the history of the road and with the unfolding views and various stops at key points, the journey should be a highlight. Sani Pass is at a height of 2874m and some breathlessness may be a feature!
- From the top of the pass we hope to have time to hike out towards Hodgeson's Peaks. The two peaks (3244m & 3256m) form the rim of the Giant's Cup when viewed from the valley below.
- Close to the top of the pass is the Sani Top Chalet, proudly known for being the highest pub in South Africa – perhaps in all Africa, and this is where we spend the night. 4-5 hours. (B,D)
- DAY 5 **Giants Castle:** Today we head north from the Southern Drakensberg driving to Giant's Castle one of the most attractive 'Berg Parks and our home for two nights. It is a circuitous route along minor roads at the foot of the escarpment but always interesting. In the afternoon we walk to the Main Caves and hear about the San people and see fine examples of their Rock Art on the cave walls. Chalets. (B,D)
- DAY 6 **Langalibalele Pass:** After an early breakfast we head out for a long day (about 8 hours) where we aim to hike up to Langalibalele Pass. This day is a good opportunity to prepare us for Cathedral Peak giving us a height gain of about 1170m. Although the day is fairly long, the walking is relatively easy under foot with good open views of the escarpment from the little berg. Chalets. (B,L,D)
- DAY 7 **Cathedral Peak area – Rainbow Gorge:** After breakfast this morning we continue with our traverse of the Drakensberg and drive onto Didima Camp, with Cathedral Peak clearly visible ahead. Didima Camp is really interesting - architecturally designed chalets have been themed after caves of the San Bushman. There is

time for a walk through one of the most beautiful Little Berg gorges - Rainbow Gorge. This is a picturesque hike where there are coloured fungi and lichens, mosses and ferns in the forest, and many pools, rapids and falls along the Ndumeni River. Chalets (B,D)

DAY 8 **Cathedral Peak:** (3004m) is a magnificent long day with high walking up a series of open ridges. The final section (200m) is exposed with some moderate scrambling which may not suit everybody. There is also a small ladder pitch before reaching the summit. It is well worth the effort, but you must make your own decision and may choose to remain at the col, which is in itself a fine vantage point. Cathedral Peak is one of the major free-standing Drakensberg peaks and is visible from a great distance. A big day and one of the highlights of the trip. 8-10 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 9 **Mweni::** We drive to the remote upper Mweni valley to visit the amaNgwane (Zulu) people who manage a sustainable Visitor Centre providing accommodation, and various activities. It will be a good opportunity to gain some appreciation of the history and traditions of the Zulu peoples. Rondavels. (B,D)

DAY 10 **Tugela Gorge:** We drive to the Royal Natal National Park, a small area of the Drakensberg and the first to be granted National Park status in 1916 and walk up the Tugela gorge into which one of the highest waterfalls (948m) in the world tumbles from the Drakensberg plateau. (We must also have a swim!) 3-4 hours. Chalets. (B,L,D)

DAY 11 **Mont aux Sources/Sentinel:** Our final encounter with the Drakensberg is a fitting finale. A mountain access road means we begin hiking higher than on any other day and the absence of sweat and toil is replaced by pure enjoyment. A scramble up a rocky gully, the only weakness in a long cliff, leads onto the plateau. We have lunch where the river tumbles dramatically into the Tugela gorge to land where we were standing yesterday! Afterwards we continue to the summit of Mont-aux-Sources, only a blip on the plateau but at 3282m, the highest peak in the northern 'Berg' and just within the borders of Lesotho. Finally we have the excitement of making the infamous 100 rung steel ladder descent of the cliffs. Chalets. (B,L,D)

DAY 12 **Depart:** Drive out along the fast highway to Durban and the airport. (B)



Underneath 'The Sentinel'

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