



CHAIRMAN'S 2010/11 ANNUAL REPORT

August 2011

1. Introduction

The Drakensberg mountain range is a prime ecotourism destination offering immense beauty, peace and tranquillity. There to stimulate our senses is the awesome sight of majestic basalt monoliths, the feeling of the fresh cool breezes, the soft sound of cascading crystal clear water and the delicate scent of the grassland flowers. This World Heritage site is on our doorstep and the Midlands Hiking Club takes you there.

While hiking, I sometimes wonder what others are doing with their weekends. What are they doing that could be more enjoyable and better for the body and soul. I also wonder why more fellow members aren't hiking with us. Do they find it too much 'hassle' to participate in our activities, or do they really have other more important commitments.

The Midlands Hiking Club was formed by a few like-minded outdoor enthusiasts in our city probably thinking that maybe there are others doing what they like doing most. Maybe there could be some advantage in connecting with them, so that they could be shown more interesting and challenging places, and vice versa.

My point is that, the Midlands Hiking Club would have been formed for a purpose, and with a goal in mind. Let us then turn to the club's Constitution and look at our aims and objectives.

2. Aims and Objectives

Under the heading of 'aims and objectives' the Constitution defines the purpose of our club, as:

- to promote hiking and backpacking activities,
- to foster good relationships between hikers; and to work with other similar clubs and associations,
- to train members in skills and competence for leading groups of hikers,
- to encourage the development of awareness of nature; and to promote nature conservation, and finally
- to encourage the improvement of facilities and trails.

In summary, the purpose of our club is primarily to encourage participation in hiking and backpacking activities, but by implication also means exercising and improving body fitness while developing an appreciation of nature and our environment. The sustainability issues are to work with others, to train leaders and to work towards improving facilities.

So the purpose of the Chairman's Report is to place on record a summary of our achievements over the past year. It also is an appropriate time to set new goals for the forthcoming year based on the review of past achievements.

3. Achievements

3.1 Membership

The number of members and current trends are a good indicator of the wellness of the club.

We started off the year with a membership strength of 121. During the year we welcomed 8 new family members and 11 new ordinary members, but with resignations and others defaulting on subscriptions the current membership stands at 41 family members and 61 ordinary members. We have ended the year with a membership strength of 143.

While this positive trend is to be welcomed, it is actually more important that we also record improved levels of participation in our activities. In this way we can be assured that we are in fact meeting the needs of our members.

3.2 Activities

At the beginning of the club year the management committee developed an activity framework for the forthcoming year. It was based on what we believed would satisfy the needs of our members, bearing in mind differing levels of fitness and activity preferences.

Our goals and actual activities for the year are summarised below:

Activities for the 2010/11 Year			
Activity	Frequency	Goal	Actual
Social evenings	Bi-monthly	6	6
Day hikes	3 per month	36	45
Cave weekends	1 per month	12	4
Camping weekend	1per month	12	14
Night hike	1 per year	1	0
Climbing/tenting weekend	1 per year	1	4
Cottage weekends	8 per year	8	13
Long distance trails	2 per year	2	2
Hiking/biking activity	Bi-monthly	6	10
Educational			3

It would appear that we have done well. The number of day hikes is not only local but also include those hikes we do when we are away for the weekend but not too far from our base. Hikers are always encouraged to join hikes even if they are not staying over.

Although we did not set ourselves a target for the year, we have introduced the concept of educational activities. This is in line with our Constitution which is to encourage the development of an awareness of nature. Some 24 of our members and friends attended a most interesting presentation at the African Birds of Prey near the Lion Park. Incidentally we also had four of our members riding out to the venue on their mountain bikes.

Last month we had new members Debbie and Sven Jager giving us a presentation of their visit to the Great Wall of China, one of the ‘Seven Wonders of the World’.

Another educational activity was an historical train ride from Creighton to Riverside and back, not only to appreciate the flowering aloes but also to be reminded of steam engines and the early development of our rail system. Unfortunately this had to be cancelled due to a lack of support from our members. Nevertheless we will set ourselves a goal and continue to arrange educational activities in the forthcoming year.

Not only have we set up an activity framework but we also are now keeping records of attendance at our activities so that, going forward, we can adjust our framework to suit the demand. Over the past year we have achieved a combined attendance figure of 383.

3.3 Mountain Biking

For some time now we have been encouraging our members to bring along their mountain bikes. In fact during the past year we have had 10 occasions where mountain biking could have been accommodated in conjunction with our hiking activities. Though mountain biking is at present the most popular participation sport in our country there does not appear to be too much interest amongst our members.

The question is, do we continue to promote mountain biking as an option or do we abandon the initiative. The management committee is in favour of such a move but we also know that some members have expressed a concern. It is for this reason that I have introduced a proposal to make an amendment to the Constitution. However, it is the members that will decide whether mountain biking should, or should not, be a future club activity.

I look forward to hearing members views and we will as a collective decide what is in the best interest of our club. If we have the support of two-thirds of the members attending the Annual General Meeting then we will amend the Constitution. If not, then we will refrain from promoting this activity.

4. Management Committee

4.1 Present Structure

You are reminded that the management committee structure, as per the Constitution, and the current incumbents are:

Chairman	Brian Henwood
Vice-Chairman	Mark Nellist
Secretary	Libby Deysel
Treasurer	Kevin Knox-Davies
Club Activities	Irene Wisdom
Newsletter Editor	Noel Harper
Webmaster	Rod Hart
One Other member	John Fourie

In addition, the management committee is supported by a number of experienced leaders; they are Dave Sclanders, Keith Ashton, Bushy Kirby, Mark Nellist, Mary Clover, Brian Henwood, Kevin Knox-Davies, John Fourie and Alison Gunning. The committee and leaders have met on a bi-monthly basis throughout the year and have compiled the fixture lists containing a wide variety of interesting activities.

Turning our attention to matters electronic, I am sure you all will agree that Rod Hart does a wonderful job of developing and maintaining our website. This is done in a very professional manner at very little cost to the club. He keeps the information up to date and regularly reports to our committee on the number of visitors to our website. For instance in June he reported that we were receiving, in an average week, 37 unique visitors, 27 first time visitors and 10 returning visitors (our members). This suggests that our site is being visited by around 300 persons per month that have an interest in hiking. Some of the local visitors to our website join our activities and ultimately become new members. We have also had foreign students as well as the hiking club of the University of Zululand joining our hikes.

4.2 Proposed Changes to the Management Committee

The club has operated for several years with a committee member assigned to so-called PRO duties, with the primary objective being to increase our membership. While growing our membership is important for sustainability, equally important is looking after our current members

by listening to what they have to say, meeting their expectations and helping them get involved in club activities. It has been proposed that the number of committee members be increased from 8 to 9, in order to add a portfolio that will focus on 'membership' issues.

The main event of any Annual General Meeting is the election of office bearers for the ensuing year. Libby Deysel, Irene Wisdom and Noel Harper have indicated that they wish to stand down after serving on our committee for several years. We are very grateful for their time, effort and commitment and accordingly respect their desire to stand down. Noel Harper has for more than 10 years efficiently collated the reports from hike leaders, and the chairmen, and distributed our newsletter to members on time, every time. Libby Deysel assisted her late husband Ossie when he was our Treasurer, and then took over the portfolio of Secretary. Irene Wisdom has been coordinating and compiling our fixture list of club activities. To Noel, Libby and Irene we express our sincere appreciation for their services to the club.

If the membership approves of the addition of a ninth committee member, then we have four vacancies on our committee. We are encouraged and grateful that some members have been invited and have indicated that they would be prepared to stand for election. We are also grateful that the remaining 5 committee members have made themselves available for re-election.

5. Conclusion

The Midlands Hiking Club was formed by a group of outdoor enthusiasts with a desire to bring together hikers with a common appreciation for the natural beauty that surrounds us and a desire for physical fitness and fresh air. I would like to acknowledge some of those founding members, such as Bushy and Pat Kirby, Mike and Dallas Kirby, Adrian Flett, Casper and Liz Labuschagne, and Andrew and Joan Templeton that are still participating in our activities today. This is an indication that we are continuing to achieve the goals and objectives that they had in mind.

Over the past year we have arranged outdoor activities on virtually every weekend of the calendar. Some of the activities were cancelled either due to bad weather or poor attendance but nevertheless we provided our members with the opportunities to enjoy a variety of outdoor activities throughout the year.

I trust that we have satisfied the expectations of our members, for which I would like to give credit to our committee members and leaders. Our success can only be attributed to the voluntary work of our committee members and the time given by our leaders over weekends in managing our various activities. On behalf of our members I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the committee members and leaders for their unselfish commitment throughout the year.

With their continued involvement we can all look forward to another successful year with confidence.

Brian Henwood

Chairman: Midlands Hiking Club