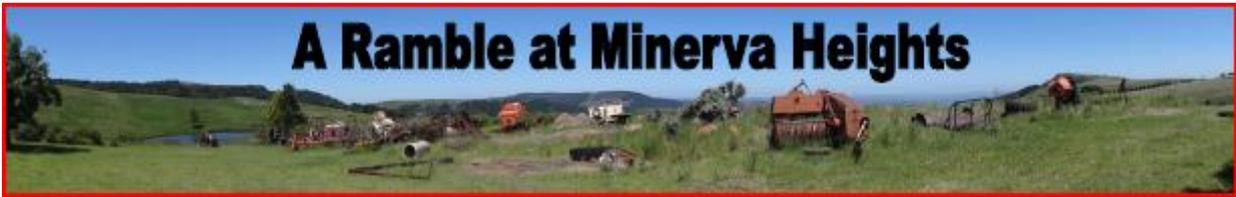


# A Ramble at Minerva Heights



25 hikers from Ramblers, MBC and Midlands met at Byrne valley's St Mary Magdalene Church on Sunday, 5 January, ready to embark on the day's adventure under the experienced leadership of David Tighe and Philip Swart. A string of vehicles negotiated the last ten kilometres up a steep gravel road to the Minerva Heights nature reserve, enjoying breathtaking views of the rolling hills and valleys on the way.

Byrne is located near Richmond and is some 90km from Pinetown off the N3 to PMB. The area is named after J. C. Byrne & Co., who brought UK immigrants, known as Byrne Settlers, to Natal to start a new life between 1849 and 1851<sup>1</sup>. Minerva Heights is reputedly named after a frigate which arrived in Durban on 3 July 1850 with some 300 Byrne Settlers. The Minerva's anchor cable parted during the night of the 4<sup>th</sup> and ship was wrecked on the Bluff<sup>2</sup>.

We set off on a hot cloudless day for a warm up walk to The Peak enjoying the views in the valley below and the refreshing breeze which was present for most of the hike. Other gems on this hike were the many wild flowers which decorated the surroundings. After a short downhill stretch on the gravel road we had driven up on, we entered an indigenous forest for a steep climb which proved to be the most challenging section of the hike. Having caught our breath, we proceeded up a gentle slope to where we were rewarded with a snack stop while enjoying different views of the magnificent valley below.

En route to Picnic Rock, we passed the highest point in the area at 1556m above sea level which is home to a number of repeater aerials and some curious rock stacks. Picnic Rock again provided a wonderful vantage point from which to enjoy the valleys below. While some members enjoyed an extended rest, a group of the hikers were led down various chain ladders by David to explore the caves below; the "tent cave" was particularly impressive and boasts an "air conditioned" breeze.

The final leg through the grasslands provided a pleasant sighting of a herd of blesbok and culminated in a refreshing swim for some hikers in the little dam below the farmhouse. Lunch was enjoyed on the farmhouse's shady lawn after which some explored the Atom Engine Museum which contains a number of "things mechanical" and provides another reason for a return visit.

Our thanks to David and Philip for facilitating a most enjoyable day and we all look forward to joining them again on a hike.



<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byrne\\_Settler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byrne_Settler)

<sup>2</sup> <http://showme.co.za/durban/a-history-of-durban/>