

Clambering in Cumberland!



Pleasantly overcast, it began like any other Sunday morning hike as 22 of us set off through the hills of Cumberland Nature Reserve. Little did we know what

special treats and excitement awaited us!

This well maintained private nature reserve, ideal for day visits, is located some 16km east of Pietermaritzburg, on route to Table Mountain.

The first leg of our hike meandered through the grasslands with sightings of impala, blesbok and some birds. Two giraffe were spotted up on a hillside and, although tolerating our initial efforts at stalking them, they turned out to be camera shy and moved off as we got closer.

Shortly thereafter, we came across a palm-nut vulture. Initially we thought it was a juvenile eagle of sorts, but upon closer inspection (and a quick google search) it was identified. What a thrill to finally be able to tick it off.



Making our way down to the majestic Umgeni river, we had to “beware”, for in the bushes were crocodiles, ready to gobble up any unsuspecting hiker who strayed too close to the water’s edge (at least that is what we thought the sign meant).

On the way back up through the grassland, we once again spotted the palm-nut vulture and two young giraffe who were a lot more calm and inquisitive and didn't mind posing for a few pictures.



Having reached the edge of the mountain, which provided breath-taking views of the river and valley below, we stopped for a snack break.



Dave, with a warning that the next stage would be more technical, then led us down to the waterfall. The path was certainly challenging, with numerous rocky obstacles requiring the use of arms, legs and the occasional bottom. The waterfall was magnificent and a just reward for the hard work it had taken to get there.

The journey back after lunch presented its own challenges with overhanging branches and slippery rocks. Along the path a few of us spotted a little green snake making its way up a rock.

We emerged from the canopy in smaller groups and made our way through the grasslands next to



the river, before starting back up the hill. There we came across the biggest snake I've ever seen in the wild. Basking in the path was a huge African rock python. There was barely time for a photo or two

before it took fright and sped off into the grass, scattering hikers in all directions.

We completed the climb and shared our story with the rest of the group, before making our way back to the cars, sweaty, dirty, but in high spirits.

Although tough, the hike was exciting and will be one of my favourites. Thanks to Dave and Philip for picking the awesome route and for showing us yet another gem of the African bush.

Another photo of the python courtesy: Brandon Katusic

