

MOUNTAIN CLUB



WITWATERSRAND
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It happens once in a while that the most hardened mountaineer falls prey to the seductive pleasures of an armchair holiday. At least that is how the idea of the Amatolas seemed to originate. Exams had somehow come and gone, and we (Norbert Rozendal, Ken Hahlo and myself) found ourselves sitting on our behinds heartily fed up with life in general and university in particular. Then Ken suggested a few days at the Hogsback and clinched the matter with the offer of a car. The prospect of treading lush grass liberally sprinkled with yellow everlastings and nourished by babbling streams, or wandering under gothic arches of pine and oak, was the perfect antidote to mental apathy; the planning began to assume an enthusiastic tone.

At this point I cast my memory back six years to a misty day in December, in the course of which my father and I had traversed the three main Hogsback peaks. I recollected long lines of smooth dolerite slabs culminating in an elegant isolated pinnacle, which we had dubbed the Thumb. The vision of a relaxed holiday was immediately dispelled.

An uneventful 600 mile journey brought us early on a Sunday afternoon to the neat farmhouse of Mr. and Mrs. R. Whyle, tastefully surrounded by lilac bushes and clover lawns. A request to be allowed to pitch camp on the neighbouring hillside was countered with the kind offer of an unoccupied farmhouse equipped with electric lighting, hot water and various other unexpected conveniences. Thus ensconced we reviewed the prospects for the morrow. An optimistic suggestion that we should rise at 4.30 was met with the contempt which it undoubtedly deserved.

It was a rueful Ken Hahlo who found himself trudging up the slopes of the 6,025 foot third Hogsback Peak at 5.00 a.m. the following morning. In his efforts to stop a dog fight he landed a heavy punch on my shoulder, which had the (un)desired effect of rousing the entire party. The tables were soon turned, however, when my route-finding bogged us in a quarter of a mile of quagmire.

Our peak had now assumed an almost unreal air as tangled streamers of mist broke free from its cliffs and soared into the rising sun. The Thumb stood starkly erect like a sentry guarding some great mediaeval castle. The Spell broke as we toiled up the long slope, covered in bush and coarse grass. Seldom had we encountered such unrelenting obstacles to progress as the Hogsback vegetation above 5,000 feet.

Eight o'clock saw us at the foot of the Thumb, which had by now assumed less impressive proportions. It did not appear an attractive climbing proposition, and the disillusioned members of the party expressed their feelings with some impolite re-christening. The immediate prospect was depressing. To the east and south great rounded whalebacks

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of dolerite, interspersed with holdless slabs, extended as far as the eye could see. It was painfully obvious why the Hogsback Peaks had been rejected as a climbing area.

Descending below the Thumb we arrived at an overhang split by a smooth chimney. Only forty feet of cliff were visible from this point, and the suggestion of attempting a route there was scarcely received with enthusiasm. The rock was damnably cold as I ascended back-and-foot up what proved to be a **totally** holdless pitch. Since the chimney was rather wide the others found some difficulty in following.

From the spacious stance on which we were assembled a steeply sloping ramp led us to the left. A rather "walky" looking thing in Ken Hahlo's terminology, but to my mind "climby" if not "pitony". My worst fears having been realized, we directed attention to a conspicuous overhang topped by a smooth slab. A rather rickety rock pedestal was constructed as a take-off, but threatened to precipitate the party over the edge; so the leader resorted to a stabler shoulder. The others took a pull on the rope at this point.

The next stance was on a jumble of loose blocks whose presence seemed to defy all physical laws. Reminiscences of the rock-pedestal sent No.1 scuttling up a long and strenuous chimney, which emerged halfway between the two trigonometrical beacons adorning the summit. A route description is given below:-

BEACON CRAG:

- Pitch 1: (40 ft. F1). Starts about 20 yards below nek between the Thumb and the north-western corner of the Third Hogsback Peak. Ascend wide and smooth chimney for 30 ft. (facing right), overcoming two overhangs. Leave chimney to right. Large stance on sloping ramp above chimney.
- Pitch 2: (90 ft. F2). Scramble for 20 ft. above the stance to prominent overhang on left-hand finger-jam (crux). Ascend slab (delicate) for 15 ft. to grassy patch, then traverse right for 40 ft. across gully and ascend directly for a further 15 ft. to 3-man stance on series of detached blocks.
- Pitch 3: (90 ft. B2). Traverse left for 15 ft. into gully, then ascend directly surmounting an awjward chockstone at about 60 ft. Route ends between trigonometrical survey beacons on summit (6,025 ft.).

The following day was devoted to an ascent of Gaika's Kop, a peak belonging to the Hogsback complex, but standing isolate from the triple-ridge. The chief obstacle proved to be 200 yard wide strip of vlel around which no reasonable route presented itself. Carrying our clothes on our heads we waded, sometimes up to our necks, between great **ready** tussocks. Much amusement was caused by the periodic disappearance

/of each....

of each member of the party in turn as deep holes were unexpectedly encountered.

Gaika's Kop is of some historic interest as the last outpost of its eponymous chief during the Kaffir Wars. The summit, which covers about five acres, is easily defensible, and possesses a strong spring of running water. Remains of stone walls litter the area, which is also the sole abode of a rare species of marsh butterfly.

The lower slopes of the peak are clothed with dense bramble thickets in which the fruit was just ripening. We spent some time filling every available container with juicy berries - a welcome change from the usual tinned fruit which constituted our evening dessert.

A final day spent among the rolling meadows and rushing waterfalls reminded us of the less strenuous attractions of this delightful area.. Mr. Whyte's success in dairy farming is primarily the result of the application of overseas methods - mainly from New Zealand and the British Isles - in the face of strong traditional opposition. His foresight has been rewarded by the Breeder's Cup and the Soil Conservation Cup - high honours indeed in South African farming.

The Hogsback area offers a variety of attractions both to the rock-climber and the walker. The climber is likely, indeed, to find his skill severely taxed. It is to be hoped that our Club will find time to bestow on it the attention it deserves.

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Here upon this ledge since earth took form out of chaos
no one before me had set foot. On that glister of crystal quartz
under my hand no eye before mine had ever rested. I tingled as
I stood, to the very hoofsails. And an enchantment as secret
and entralling as first love seemed opening behind and within
all the unvisited cliffs and mountain walls in my sight.

Mountains with a difference -
G. W. YOUNG.