

Drakensberg Grand Traverse

Between the 13th and 24th April, 2009, I was fortunate to be part of a team of six that hiked the Drakensberg Grand Traverse, a demanding, scenic hike with friends old and new.

This is a record of what, who, when, how and why we tackled this adventure.

Comments can be emailed to me mike@hamilton.co.za

What is the Drakensberg Grand Traverse

In short, the Drakensberg Grand Traverse is a back-packing hike from Witsieshoek through to Bushmans Nek.

From the starting point, the Sentinel Car Park, the trail leads up the zig-zags to the well known chain ladders that take you to the top of the escarpment near Mont Aux Sources and the Tugela Falls.

From there, the trail hugs the escarpment and meanders over hills and down valleys offering magnificent views of the major features of the Drakensberg. Apart from the well known passes and features, the trail includes the highest points in South and Southern Africa, Mafadi and Thabana Ntanyana respectively, at elevations of just short of 3500 metres.

The traverse is completed when reaching Bushmans Nek, a border control point between South Africa and Lesotho some 230 km walking distance from the start.

The hike typically takes 12 to 13 days, and is at an average altitude of just over 3000 metres above sea level. Total ascent during the hike is in excess of 8000 metres and there are about 28 "climbs" in excess of 200 metres. No technical skill is required, the "climbs" are essentially steep ascents.

Although the hike can be done as a fully unsupported activity, it is common for hikers to be supported by friends who carry up additional supplies at the 6 day halfway mark, top of Bannermans Pass or Langalibalele Pass, and perhaps at the 9 day mark at the top of Sani Pass.

There are no facilities on the mountain and hikers must ensure self-sufficiency with respect to all weather gear, food, medical supplies etc.

The Team

		
George Christian (49)	Sue Desmond (50)	Andre Kleynhans (51)
		
Hilke Kruger (51)	Bernard Donnelly (53)	Mike Hamilton (50)

George "The Leader" (JHB) - Regular hiker and hike leader, has supported previous traversers. Wanted to do the trip for some time. Set out to recruit and lead the team. Done many Drakensberg hikes, Fish River Canyons, Otter trails etc. Fit, regular gym training.

Sue "The Boss" (JHB) - Addicted to hiking. Done traverse 3 times previously. Extremely active. Hiked in Peru, Aconcagua, Kili, and many other locations. Just completed 1000 km walk from Perth along Australian Coast. Chose to join team to keep herself in shape. Celebrated her 50th birthday the weekend before this traverse by doing 40km of hiking in lower berg. Fit. Good source of local knowledge on the hike. Knows the range well. Provided team with good planning inputs.

Andre "The Mountain Goat (Bergbok)" (East London) - Road and Off-Road runner. Completed multiple "Washies" (100 mile runs), about to do his 10th Comrades. Recently got into hiking, told by East London friends that he was mad to attempt the traverse. Very fit, very capable.

Hilke "Nothing gets me down" (JHB) - Done one traverse before. Fit. Does not have any negative adjectives in her vocabulary. Loves the scenery, feels the cold.

Bernard "Sergeant Major" (JHB) - Regular Road Race Walker. Done Kili, Otter and fish with Mike before. Good planner and organiser.

Mike "Pole-Pole (Slowly-Slowly)" (JHB) - Least fit of the bunch. Done Kili, Fish, Otter each a few times as well as a number of northern berg hikes, and has supported previous traverse group. Maintains moderate level of fitness walking, sometimes cycling and occasionally hiking. Agreed to go when realised my fitness not at level it should be and a goal would be a good idea.

A team of mature, but individually head strong individuals.

One other individual who was a ghost member of the team was Jenny Owens from Durban. I have never met her, but her GPS track was a key input that kept us on the right path in unknown areas. Jenny led many traverses and her knowledge and experience has been passed on to Sue and Hilke and now to all members of our team.

The Motivation

What drives people to spend 12 days trekking across the hills, sleeping in harsh conditions and living off limited rations in unpredictable weather conditions?

Bragging Rights - As a team of average age exceeding 50, ego is not the major driver. "Got the T-Shirt" is no longer a key concern.

What's Next - As with all activity, it gets easier if you keep doing the same thing and every now and then you must raise the bar. The traverse is perceived as one of the most challenging hikes in South Africa. After a number of completions of the other major hikes what is the next challenge or test.

Self Affirmation - For some, the ability to test one's endurance and fitness for the sole purpose of saying "I'm still doing OK" was a driver. (From Wikipedia ...The theory of self-affirmation is a psychological theory that was first proposed by Claude Steele (1988) with the premise that people are motivated to maintain the integrity of the self. Its ultimate goal is to protect an image of its self- integrity, moral and adequacy.)

Escape - To leave the day to day hurly burly of traffic, politics, crime and commercial pressures is also a key driver. Not touching a wallet or hearing the dramatised news, and concerning oneself only with basic daily considerations of where to get water and where to camp is a prime motivation.

Habit - We live out roles we define for ourselves. Sometimes our preferred identity is best portrayed by our outward behaviour. Our chosen lifestyles become a habit that we practice.

A mixture of all of the above may apply. When asking each group member in our team why they were doing the traverse, there was little clear indication or reason of substance. Perhaps we still don't know exactly why we do what we do.

Preparation

Putting together the best team, choosing the best time to do the traverse, making travel and accommodation arrangements, coordinating re-supply teams and making sure everything that will be needed is packed requires some doing.

Team Selection Considerations

How do you put a team together? What do you take into account when evaluating potential team members?

Physical Fitness - As individuals, each team member must have the requisite physical fitness to be able to walk for 8 to 9 hours per day, and cover approximately 20 to 25 km daily over varying terrain while carrying a backpack weighing up to 20kg. In certain areas there are footpaths used by Lesotho herdsman and traders, in most areas, no footpaths at all. The terrain is definitely not flat. The trail is principally a sequence of ascents and descents, some gentle and some steep. When contouring to maintain height, this is often down walking along a sloping surface without a path and this can place stress on knees and feet.

Mental Fitness - The ability to persevere regardless of the weather, personal pain, or fatigue, and with due consideration to the impact of one's own performance on the group as a whole. The group is only as fast as the slowest member. This is a hike with few choices. The hills won't go away, the weather will be what it is. Starting the hike, each member must be mentally prepared to take what comes.

Maturity - A team is merely a collection of individuals. Group function depends on the individual attitudes of each member. The team is to be together for 12 days or so and each member must manage his own thoughts and behaviour to minimise the negative impact on the group and maximise the chances of successfully completing the hike. The best definition I know of maturity is the ability to adapt one's behaviour (not value system) to maximise the potential for positive outcomes in a relationship. Once the team is put together and the hike starts, it is key that all members demonstrate maturity in their interactions and prevent unnecessary conflict and contain disproportionate responses. Complaining does not change reality, it merely creates additional stress. Conflict between members does not contribute positively to group well being.

Group Size - There are some challenges logistically as group size increases. The larger the group, the more difficult it may become to ensure that all are ready to start on time in the mornings and after tea or lunch breaks. Time spent waiting for the team to regroup after climbs or slow sections may also increase. Stress increases as the variance in individual performance increases. Organising support teams to carry up supplies also becomes difficult as more volunteers are needed for larger group support. Travel logistics is also impacted.

Our group of six proved to be cohesive and easily manageable. All members had the maturity needed and no-one was short of mental fitness. For some, particularly myself, fitness improved on the hike making it easier as we progressed from day to day.

When is the Best Time?

From a timing perspective there are a number of considerations:

Leave from Business - Employees of most organisations do not enjoy substantial amounts of leave. A hike of twelve days plus time to get to and from the start and finish of the hike means that a minimum 2 week period is required. Planning to optimise the use of public or religious holidays can assist in this regard. In South Africa, the Easter weekend, followed by a number of statutory holidays, makes April a particularly good time.

Seasonal considerations - Four Seasons in a day on the mountain is not uncommon. The weather conditions can change rapidly in mountain environments. Despite this however there are times when one stands a better chance of having fair and suitable conditions. Other seasonal considerations include temperature extremes as well as daylight hours. The summer months have longer daylight hours but are more prone to severe rainstorms. The winter months have extreme cold temperatures and shorter daylight hours. This leaves spring and autumn. Autumn presents a good opportunity, enough daylight to complete 8-9 hours walking, fairly moderate night time temperatures, less chance of storms, but still plentiful water on the mountain for drinking, cooking and washing.

The chosen time for our traverse was from 13th to 24th April 2009. This was a good combination of numerous public holidays with seasonal advantage.

Travel and Accommodation Arrangements

Any hike that finishes some distance from where it starts needs good logistical planning.

Starting the Traverse at Sentinel Car Park means that all have to get there at a specific time. For an early morning start, accommodation must be arranged nearby and transport to Car Park organised.

Finishing at Bushmans Nek, some 230 km south of the start, meant that we needed one or more vehicles at or close to the end point.

The approach we took was as follows:

- Andre, coming from East London, overnighed at Witsieshoek Hotel on Sunday. We met him for first time at the Sentinel Car Park on Monday at the start of the hike. He was dropped off by his family who then returned to East London.
- Sue, enjoying her birthday in the central berg, drove herself to meet us at Harrismith Backpackers, Sunday evening before the start. She was to leave her car at Harrismith Backpackers for the duration of the hike.
- Bernard and Hilke drove from JHB to Harrismith Backpackers to be there the Sunday evening before the start, and also to leave car at backpackers for duration of the hike
- Mike and George drove George's Landrover to Himeville Arms Hotel on Saturday, overnighed, and leaving Landrover at Himeville Arms for duration of hike, we made our way, thumbing rides back to Harrismith to join rest of team, except Andre, Sunday evening.

We now had 2 cars in Harrismith and a Landrover at Himeville. We had accommodation booked in Harrismith and early Monday morning, about 06h00, Jan and Helen of Harrismith Backpackers drove the 5 of us to Sentinel Car Park where we met Andre and started the hike.

On completion of the hike, we had arranged for Himeville Arms to collect us at Bushmans and we all overnighed at the Himeville Arms on 24th. Thereafter we left Andre behind as his wife was collecting him from Himeville, and we all piled in to our Landrover to return to Harrismith where we collected our respective cars and headed home.

All worked out well in the end. Although we had investigated bus charters, combi rental etc., our arrangements worked out fairly cost effective. The backpackers and Himeville Arms were both affordable and we were well received and amply assisted.

Re-Supply Teams

As mentioned earlier, the hike can be done fully unsupported. It is more common and arguably more pleasant to be supported by friends who at agreed points on the hike bring up fresh supplies, cheer and conversation.

Sue was tasked to arrange the re-supply team to meet us on night 6, and I was tasked to arranged for a second re-supply at the top of Sani Pass.

The first re-supply typically works as follows:

- Each team member prepares a re-supply load of no more than 2kg. Ideally this is packed into 2x1kg packages so the load can be shared by more helpers if they are available.
- A re-supply organiser gathers friends and volunteers to hike up to the escarpment carrying their own load as well as some of the traverse team load. Ideally there should be as many or more supporters than traverse team members to minimise the load impact.
- The re-supply team make own arrangements and hike up an agreed pass to meet the traverse team at a predefined location, Bannermans Pass or Langalalibele pass tops being popular for this.
- The re-supply team camps overnight with the traverse team.
- In some instances the re-supply team may hike with the traverse team to the top of the next down route, or they may go down the same pass they came up.
- The traverse team members refuse accumulated to date is taken down by the re-supply team on their departure.

Sue worked with Neil Ransome to put re-supply team together. The team included Neil, Paul, Tess, Hanneke, Coen and Bent from JHB as well as Brendan and Tish from Durban. They brought our goodies to the top of Bannermans Pass, and contributed much positive spirit and cheer. The following we walked with them to the top of Langalalibele Pass top where we had breakfast before going our separate ways.

The second re-supply is a little different:

- Sani Pass allows a four-by-four vehicle to reach us at Sani top. This means that there is no restriction with respect to re-supply team numbers and load.

- Phil Hall, a long standing friend of mine and Gabby, his daughter, joined us at Sani top. The company, the fire, the gluhwein, and champagne helped us celebrate Gabby's birthday and cope with sub-zero temperatures before heading out the following morning.
- We stayed indoors overnight in the Sani Top complex which was a welcome escape from the cold and snow we had spent the day in. We had all packed a change of clothing and enjoyed warm showers and dry clothes.

Rescue Team

To ensure recovery in event of an accident or critical situation, it is a good idea to link up with a mountain rescue unit and advise them of the itinerary and plans. George contacted and liaised with Andy Wood and Gavin Raubenheimer of the Mountain Club, Pietermaritzburg division. They were ready to be called on if needed but fortunately this was not required.

Personal Packing Lists and Goal Weights

When hiking for an extended period, the challenge of ensuring everything you need is packed and that you stay within a goal weight for your backpack is no mean feat.

Some members went to great lengths to cut down a few grams here and a few grams there. In the end, all backpacks weighed in at about 18kg when fully loaded for each day. This is surprising considering what is to be taken along.

Here is a sample schedule of what I believe is necessary to pack:

- Camping and Cooking - tent, mattress, sleeping bag, gas cooker and cylinders, lighter, pot, mug, spoon, penknife and water bottles (I prefer to take two 750ml runners bottles, one for water and one for juice).
- Accessories - Hiking Poles, head torch, GPS, maps, spare batteries, spare bootlaces, whistle, emergency blanket, plastic bags for waterproofing inside backpack, camp sandals or "cros".
- Clothing - Rain gear (Shell with hood and long trousers). Warm gear including beanie, fleece, thermals, gloves and perhaps a down jacket. Walking gear including shirts (3), shorts (2), socks and underwear (3 sets), gaiters and boots.
- Medical - Strapping plaster, blister plasters, Deep Heat, Voltaren, Suntan Lotion, Zambuk, Antiseptic, optionally water purification tablets and personal prescriptions.
- Toiletries - Toilet Paper, toothpaste and toothbrush, hiking towel, facecloth, and optionally bio-degradable soap.
- Food - This is a very personal space. Aim to pack about 600g to 700g per day. This would mean that no more than about 3.6 to 4.2kg should meet your needs for 6 days up until re-supply one.
 - Depending on your weight, you may need more or less calories per day than someone else. Balancing calorific needs with weight restrictions can be quite a science. Take time to look at energy and weight ratios and you will be quite surprised and perhaps rethink about what you carry.
 - In short you need multiple small meals and snacks throughout the day to ensure a constant energy supply.
 - Preparation times must fit in with the group schedules. Quick meals (instant oats / soups) make it easier for everyone to ensure they do not delay the group early in the morning or at short stops during the day. Evening meals can take more time.
 - Main Meals as well as snacks and treats should be packed, including teas, drink sachets etc. Dehydrated meals good for main dinner meals; tuna packs, cheese and provita good for lunches; energy bars, nuts and trail mixes good for snacks; and Milo or cappuccino sachets great as a bedtime treat.
- Water and drinks - depending on availability of fresh water on the mountain, you should be prepared to carry between 750ml and 2 litres of water. If you sure you are to be camping at water, this can be reduced during the day.

The Experience

It is after all, all about the experience. Months of talking and planning finally culminate in the start of the trip. Without going into an itinerary and day by day blow account, I will share some of the key aspects of the experience:

Beauty and Tranquility

I have seen the Drakensberg many times but never quite as I experienced it on this trip. Twelve days of walking in scenery that is splendid does not dull the senses to the beauty and sense of tranquility that abounds. Having said this, it must be noted that the scenery does change through the trip:

- The northern part of the hike is majestic. The peaks, passes, ridges and cutbacks are bold in their definition. Scenes like Madonna and her Worshippers, the Traveller, Mweni, Rockeries, Cockade, Cathedral and the Chessmen etc are understated when referred to as grand. Looking down on the sea of clouds in the early mornings is surreal. The effort expended is forgotten and you run out of adjectives and refrain from even attempting to describe the grandeur. The climbs and descents are steep and frequent and the reality that the top of the escarpment is not flat certainly hits home.
- The southern part of the hike is more tranquil. The valleys are wider, the climbs more gradual and less frequent. Although you go higher in elevation, it seems less challenging. Perhaps this is because you become fitter as you progress, to perhaps it is a change in the terrain. There is a wonderful sense of open space and timelessness. Hills have kraals on them and shepherds and their sheep and horses are seen fairly regularly. The ground is fertile, moles by the million.

Weather

No-one can accurately predict the weather. Before doing the trip I did some reading on weather forecasting, the meaning of barometric pressure changes etc. Interesting to note was reference to a method of forecasting referred to as "The Persistence Model". Unlike most forecasting models that require large counts of data gatherers, complex processing and mathematical modelling, the Persistence Model requires no data gathering, analysis or modelling and is believe it or not statistically more accurate! In essence, the Persistence Model is nothing more than the prediction that the weather tomorrow will be the same as today!

I liked the approach as we started on a fair day. I decided to optimise the model and referred to it as the "Optimistic Persistence Model" suggesting that the weather tomorrow would be the same or even better than today!

The weather conformed to this model for the first 7 days! We started out fair and enjoyed sunny and rainless days. On the 8th day we had cloud and rain late in the afternoon. On the 9th day, we had sleet followed by snow for most of the day trundling into Sani. This added greatly to the experience of getting to highest point in Southern Africa, Thabana Ntanyana, enjoying the displays of ice bedecked frozen grasses. Quite spectacular.

Not keen to start the 10th day in sub-zero conditions we were somewhat sceptical about the weather. True to form, the model kicked in, the days got better and we rolled through the rest of the trip in good weather.

A point to note is that the weather conditions and the mood and cohesiveness of the team appeared to be in sync. Whether our moods reflected the weather, or the weather reflected our moods is anyone's guess. All I can say is that we were blessed having 10 out of 12 days of exceptional weather. I can understand that teams doing the traverse in foul weather would certainly be more stressed and challenged than we were.

The Elements

Of course as a hiker you expect to be out facing the elements. I always enjoy being aware of the moon and its phases, and feeling the sun and wind on my skin.

- Wind - Anabatic (upward) and Katabatic (downward) winds are expected depending on time of day. On fair weather days we had the most wind pre-sunrise through to about 09h00 and late afternoons from about 16h00. This was only upset by the arrival of a cold front bringing rain and snow and a windy day or two just before we reached Sani.
- Water - Tasting the cool and fresh mountain water is always a treat, although one must be aware, particularly in the southern areas of the hike, of where herds are grazing and pick water spots upstream wherever possible.
- Sunshine - Don't be fooled by the cool temperatures. At altitude, the atmosphere offers less protection from the sun than it does at lower levels. One afternoon we reached our camp at about 15h00 and I sat for two hours without my fishing hat as protection. I had sun-blisters and sunburn that forced me to coat my face with Zambuk at 03h00 the next morning and for a few days thereafter. Even though we were walking mainly with the sun at our backs, heading south, sun protection was needed, particularly for those walking in shorts with peak caps who burnt their necks and the back of their legs.
- Temperature - We were most fortunate with the weather. Minimum temperatures of no worse than perhaps a few degrees below freezing and maximums somewhere in the top twenties. It got cold from about 16h30 and once in our tents, typically before 18h00 due to the cold conditions we would remain in our sleeping bags until the next morning at 05h30.

Pace and Timing

Having based our planning on a 13 day schedule, which we planned to do in 12 days, we needed to make up some ground. Previous traverse teams allowed for 2-3 days of acclimatisation with limited distances being covered during those days.

- Our plan allowed for approximately 20km per day. We covered the guideline schedules Day 1 and Day 2 in one day, camping just short of Madonna. Our second day we covered Day 3 and part of Day 4 of our guideline schedule meaning that we had some insurance against bad weather if needed.
- We reached Bannermans at 11h00 on our sixth day allowing us to do some rest and recovery, dry out tents, and do washing before our re-supply team joined us.
- We gained distance on our seventh day giving us insurance for the leg to Sani. This was useful as the day before Sani it rained late in the afternoon and the day to Sani where we summited Thabana Ntanyana. The ice landscapes and frozen vegetation were a sight to behold. We were slowed by the climb, continuous sleet and snow. We reached Sani top in the snow by 15h00. Sani could not have been better placed for a welcome break from the cold and the raw elements.
- The final leg to Bushmans was easily covered. We again made up time due to the fair weather from Sani and left ourselves a short final day getting down Thomatu Pass to Bushmans Nek border control by 11h45.
- All in all, probably due to fair weather and a disciplined team, we had little difficulty in covering the distance required each day. By ensuring we kept to our planned stops and breaks and were all ready to leave on time, we were able to go at a pace comfortable to the slowest in the team, myself, and reach our daily goals.

People Encounters

An experience like this is greatly affected by the encounters you have with other people. Overall this was an incredibly positive trip.

- The hospitality, openness and kindness of some of the Himeville Arms staff to George and I was wonderful. Caron kindly offered us a lift from Underberg to Merrivale when we needed it, and we felt like more than guests, rather like friends in the local community. After Sani, we had sent some kit backs down to Himeville and arranged for our collection from Bushmans Nek a few days hence. All worked out well and it was greatly appreciated.
- Jan and Helen, not only accommodated us at very favourable rates in the backbackers they are no longer advertising, but also woke early and drove us to Witsieshoek in their cars to ensure we could get an early start. Even though it appeared that Helen's clutch was damaged due to driving on such rough roads there was no hint of regret at assisting us. Fortunately we confirmed after the trip that her car was fine.
- Witsieshoek, at the Sentinel Car Park was as disorganised as usual. We supplied a hike register sheet with all our info and paid fees despite the person in attendance indicating that there are no receipts. Whether the fees paid go to any cause relating to assisting hikers is a good question.
- Casual hikers who spend the Easter weekend in around the Tugela Falls area on top of the escarpment are always susceptible to opportunistic theft. We met, as always, disgruntled hikers that had lost boots and backpacks despite the fact that they were followed down by Parks Board guards carrying rifles. It seems this problem is here to stay.
- In the central berg area, we encountered numerous "Dagga Smugglers". Initially small groups of 3 or 4 people acting as mules each carrying a sack, heading for one of the passes in the late afternoon. Hoping to offload their goods and return in the early hours of the morning. As we neared Judges, ironically, we met the largest groups we had seen. There were approximately 40 to 50 men gathered around donkeys with large quantities of sacks. They were not aggressive and we moved through the group as we crossed the saddle on the path they were probably waiting to use for a large drop later that evening. It appeared that this was a key meeting point of two groups, perhaps one from Lesotho and the other responsible for moving on into South Africa. Generally they do not engage negatively as they have a task to do and probably do want to draw undue attention to themselves and jeopardise their chances of completing their work. We talked briefly, shared some sweets and dried fruit, and enquired as to next position of availability of water. We noticed that they sent an observer to watch our movements and we chose to move away from the main path, camping some 500 metres off the path lower down in a valley. We saw nothing further. Perhaps they moved in the night, perhaps they waited another day. Looking at the people involved they are pawns in a bigger game. Some had no shoes, wearing only their blanket as protection against the elements. Not a platform for discussion but I sense the blame lies more with the target buyers and drug lords than it does with the "mules" who are scratching together a living. It is easy to judge from a position of comfort, and I leave others to judge as they see fit.
- As we progressed further south and the landscape opened up with broader and flatter valleys, we encountered more shepherds. Kraal dotted each hill and herds of sheep and horses grew in number. It was interesting to witness the hill to hill communication between shepherds, as well as the good relationship between the shepherds and their multiple

dogs. Friendly, always keen on a handout of sweets, we had no negative interactions at all. A harsh lifestyle that remind us how little some people can live on.

- On reaching Bushmans Nek border control point we offered our passports but as we were hikers it was indicated that this was unnecessary. We had not technically left South Africa although we spent the last 12 days walking predominantly on the Lesotho side of the international boundary. The border was most friendly and no objection to being used to take photographs of our group and allowing us to enjoy some cold drinks and beers on the verandah of his post.

Reflections

Now that the trip is over, what remains? An opportunity to reflect on the trip highlights a few points:

Team Dynamics

It is often easier to speak of a team than to be one. The team is nothing more than a grouping of cooperative individuals.

George, as the initiator and "leader" of the group was in a position of delicate authority. I say delicate because in a situation such as this a leader actually has no authority at all. The ability to lead hinges purely on the willingness of all to accept leadership that is offered. Within a group of strong willed individuals, some with more experience than others, there are times when a difference of opinion arises. With all the members having done many hikes before, there were few if any who believed they were dependent on others to complete a days walk or the hike itself. As such, on certain occasions multiple groups followed multiple routes despite initial ground rules requesting the team stay together. I know of traverses where mutiny occurs and the group has chosen to ignore the leader altogether. In certain scenarios I believe the leader must exercise a casting vote and make the final call if the team does not reach consensus. Other than that, if the team functions well, the leader can act as and be the same as any other member of the group. George did this well. At different times different members led the way. Route changes were generally agreed on and consideration was given to the views of each member.

This raises the point of ground rules for the hike. Apart from agreeing start times, break times, and end points for each day, there is little else to agree on. Common sense should prevail. If the weather is fair and unchanging the group can spread out over a larger area. If the weather is changing or poor, the group stresses are better managed by staying close. The leader has no authority to expel a member from the team or prevent him from staying with the group. This position should not arise if all behave maturely, managing their own internal conflicts and responses to others.

Complaining and grumbling are counter productive. Constantly highlighting one's pain or problems does not achieve anything. The hike must continue unless severe challenges exist. Aches and pains are private experiences that should not be harped on. Address the condition as best as one can and get on with it.

Team selection is probably one of the most important aspects of traverse preparation.

Fortunately our group experienced limited challenges from a physical perspective and the fair weather prevented major conflicts associated with team dynamics. There were some challenges but maturity prevailed and we moved on beyond the conflicts.

One of the things we did at the end of most days was to get the team to come together in a circular embrace or huddle and end the days walk. I suggested we should use this time to symbolically cast our grudges and negative emotions on the floor in the circle between us before we all stamped our feet as a means of putting problems behind us. It was interesting to me that there were days where I had difficulty letting go. I was sometimes reluctant to stamp my foot down in the circle and move on. Silly, but interesting.

What would I Do Differently

Not much. Better planning up front as far as tools and route planning is concerned is perhaps one area we could have optimised.

Maps and GPS's - We had maps and we had GPS's. The maps we had were copies of map sections that presented a one day at a time view of our proposed routes. One of the things we did not ensure was that each map section had clear indications of latitude and longitude to enable us to pinpoint our position from GPS coordinates. This meant that we were still left to guess or attempt to triangulate our position as best we could. In fact, some sections had latitude and longitude indications

but on testing against GPS references at known points these were found to be incorrect. As we had fair weather and good visibility this was not a major challenge. It could have been otherwise.

GPS Familiarisation - Some of us had new GPS's that we had not as yet fully familiarised ourselves with. While we were fully at ease with routes, waypoints and followed sample tracks from previous traverses, we had not setup the GPS correctly to prevent overwriting of new tracks we were taking. A bit more time spent on GPS familiarisation and we could have brought back a full record of the actual track we followed daily which could in turn have been passed on to future traversers.

Route Planning - Although we had a proposed route schedule, we did not rigidly adhere to it. We walked beyond our proposed daily end point almost every day. Doing it again I would take into account the enhanced energy levels that we enjoy in the morning. What we did worked out well, the only challenge was that we were building the route on the fly. The early starts were great, hill climbing in the morning is easier than in the heat of the afternoon after having walked 20km. Plan the route so that the challenging hills are first thing in the morning or immediately after a scheduled break like breakfast or lunch and the team members have had ample recovery time before taking on the next challenge. Most mornings we knocked off at least 15 km, leaving only 5 to 10km for the afternoons. This allowed us to setup camp early enough to enjoy the late afternoon before the cold set in.

Records

GPS tracks, way points and routes are available. Photographs taken by George, Bernard, Andre, Sue and Phil. Last of all, the memories of the trip will last forever.

Contact me for any information as needed. mike@hamilton.co.za

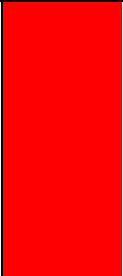

Mapsource GPS Inputs

See attachment(s): [Grand Traverse 090426.gdb](#)

This attachment contains Routes, Tracks and Waypoints that may be of benefit to other hikers of the Berg and traversers in particular.

Sample Menu (Bernard)

From menu below it can be seen that about 2000 calories per day are provided for. Topping this up with additional nibbles and snacks can get calories up to 2500 or 3000 which is roughly enough for reasonable active male of 90kg. On the trip, both Bernard and I started the trip at about 97kg and lost about 5kg by the time we returned home, despite having eating well in Himeville! Admittedly we were working at far higher levels of activity than we were used to. It must however be said that our energy levels were high on this menu and we did not feel particularly fatigued.

	Breakfast		Lunch		Dinner		KJ	Cal
Mon 13			3 cheese wedges	540	Paneer Curry	2600	Convert-->	4
			Provita	400	Basmati Rice	1042		
			250g dr fruit	2500	bettasnack	1000		
			Tang	500	Coffee	318	8900	2,122
Tues 14	Oats x 2	1600	Tuna	500	Roast Lamb & Veg	1500		
	Tea		Tucks	1000	Bettasnack	1000		
			Macadamias 75g	1950	Coffee	318		
	Tang	500	safari bar	420			8788	2,095
Wed 15	Oats x 2	1600	Snack Soup	584	Pasta Vegetarian	1500		
	Tea		Provita	400	Lemon Cream	950		
			Brazil 75g	2100				
			Dr peaches 70g	1000	Coffee	318		
			Tang	500			8952	2,134

Thurs 16	Oats x 2	1600	3 cheese wedges	540	Beef & Pasta Hot Pot	1500		
	Tea		Rice Cakes	700	Lemon Cream	950		
			Macadami as 75g	1950				
			250g dr fruit	550	Coffee	318		
			Tang	500			8608	2,052
Fri 17	Oats x 2	1600	Snack Soup	584	Spag Bog	1500		
	Tea		Provita	400	Marie	900		
	Tang	500	Cashews 75g	1950	Coffee	318		
			Safari bar	417			8169	1,948
Sat 18	Oats x 2	1600	Tuna	500	Kashmiri Curry	2100		
	Tea		Ryvita	400	Veg Rice	1042		
			Macadami as 75g	1950	wine 500ml MARie	900		
			Tang	500	Coffee	318	9310	2,220
Sun 19	Oats x 2	1600	3 cheese wedges	540	Sweet & Sour Lamb	1500		
	Tea		Provita	400	Biscuits			
	Tang	500	Macadami as 75g	1950	Coffee	318		
			Jungle bar	755			7563	1,803

Mon 20	Oats x 2	1600	Tuna	500	Thai Curry	1500		
	Tea		Ryvita	400	Biscuits			
			Brazil nuts 100g	2800	Coffee	318		
			Tang	500			7618	1,816
Tues 21	Oats x 2	1600	SANI	2500	SANI	2500		
	Tea		Tang	500			7100	1,693
Wed 22	SANI	2000	Snack Soup	584	Beef Curry	1500		
			Provita	400	Biscuits			
	Tang	500	cashews 75g	200	Coffee	318		
			jungle bar	755			6257	1,492
Thurs 23	Oats x 2	1600	Tuna	500	Honey Soy Chicken	1500		
	Tea		Ryvita	400	Biscuits			
			Brazil nuts 75g	2100				
			[Redacted]		Coffee	318	6918	1,649
	Tang	500						
Fri 24	Oats x 2	1600	3 cheese wedges	540	HOTEL			
	Tea		[Redacted]					
			Tang	500				
			Jungle bar	755			3395	809

Sample Packing List

This is an incomplete sample showing how easy it is to get to 18kg! Notice some items have no weight entered and depending on the specific gear each member takes, the Rucksack, tent, sleeping bag etc. can vary greatly.

This is based on measurements done by one of the team members.

Packing list Drakensberg GT.	
Item	Ideal (grams)
Ruck sack	2,610
Rain cover	106
Sleeping bag	1,650
Sleeping mattress	855
Tent	1,200
Ground sheet	.
Rain poncho/ Rain Shell	314
Rain pants	467
Cooking	912
Eating/washing	
1.5 x Gas	530
First aid & sun block	750
Toiletries, toilet roll and towel	
Navigation (maps compass GPS)	750
Watch camera cell book	
Head torch	
Sunglasses, Reading Glasses	
Batteries	
Water bottles	120
10x Plastic bags	40
Clothes	2,500
Weight without food/water	12,804
Food and snacks (6 days)	4,200
Water (1 litre)	1,000
Total	18,004