

# The Drakensberg Traverse

Perhaps better known for its well-managed game parks and wealth of diamonds, one of South Africa's best-kept secrets is that it is also a hiker's paradise. For those who love walking in mountains, the Drakensberg - Dragon Mountains - are unsurpassed. This World Heritage Site offers dramatic scenery, well preserved mountain splendour and diversity of fauna and flora. A strong hold of the Zulu nation and known to them as 'uKhahlamba' - Barrier of Spears, there are several summits over 3000m, (9800ft) but without permanent snow

Forming the international boundary between the province of KwaZulu Natal of South Africa and the small land-locked Lesotho the eastern face of the 'Berg' forms a dramatic, steep escarpment which runs for almost 200km (120miles).and there can be few sights in South Africa as awe-inspiring as the massive rock walls of the Amphitheatre, a colossal 4 km long cliff face of solid basalt that forms the backdrop to the Royal Natal National Park. Only a few isolated valleys have any human settlement and the vast majority is an untamed wilderness of high exposed plateaus, soaring buttresses, remote valleys and deep gorges waiting to be explored. Our fully-supported camping trek follows the crest of the northern Berg, taking in the finest sections of this dramatic range passing such evocatively named features as the Devil's Tooth, Fang Pass, the Twelve Apostles and Cathedral Peak.



Overlooking Organ Pipes Pass from Cleft Peak



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## Itinerary

This itinerary is intended to be a guideline. It is given in good faith but we cannot guarantee that the Great Walk will follow this itinerary to the letter. If there are any differences between our published brochure and these trip notes, the trip notes are the most up-to-date version and supersede the brochure. Where meals are included in the trip price they are indicated by the letter (B) Breakfast, (L) Lunch, (D) Dinner.

### DAY 1

We depart from London on an evening flight with South African Airways to Johannesburg, arriving early the following morning.

### DAY 2

After arrival we are met by our South African guides and transfer by private vehicle to the Drakensberg region. We stay at the delightful Cavern Berg Resort in the Northern Drakensberg. The camp is situated in a pristine wilderness area directly below the peaks of Hlolela and Sungubala (7000ft), just north of Royal Natal National Park. Accommodation is in thatched huts with en-suite facilities. (L,D)

### DAY 3

After a leisurely breakfast we drive to the Tugela River car park and begin our acclimatisation hike into the beautiful Tugela Gorge. This walk takes us towards the base of the Tugela Falls, where the Tugela River plunges 948 meters (3,109 ft.) from the Drakensberg plateau, its combined drop making it the second highest waterfall in the world. The four mile walk is ideal for stretching our legs and we can break the journey at the half way point for a picnic lunch. We follow a trail which leads into the deepest recesses of the gorge where there are numerous rock pools, ideal for swimming on hot days. In the afternoon we return to our camp for cold drinks on the veranda, and can look forward to another evening spent beneath starry African skies. (B,L,D)

### DAY 4

We spend a further acclimatisation day based out of the Cavern Berg Resort. Options for today's walk include Cannibal Cave where there are ancient cave paintings, and Surprise Ridge which provides an outstanding panorama across the peaks of the Amphitheatre. (B,L,D)

### DAY 5

In the morning we drive to the Sentinel Car Park at the start of our six day walk. Here we meet our porters and prepare our loads for them to carry. From here, The Sentinel (3165m/10384ft) and Beacon Buttress (3047m/10000ft) are both in view immediately ahead of us. We set off via the Mahai Valley and hike through rugged scenery of sandstone cliffs and streams up to the top of the Little Berg at 2130m (7000 ft). We then gradually ascend a further 760m (2500 ft), almost to the top of the main escarpment where the way is barred by a steep cliff. Here we are confronted by the famous Chain Ladders. These 30m (100 ft) long steel chain ladders are in two sections and provide relatively easy access to the summit plateau. They are steep and somewhat exposed but sure-footed walkers with a head for heights will not find them difficult. After negotiating the chain ladder, it is just over a half hour's walk to the Amphitheatre edge where the Tugela River

plunges almost 1000m (3280ft) down five cascades into the gorge below. We camp near the top of the falls in a stunning location on the crest of the Amphitheatre. For the energetic it is possible to make a short detour to the summit of Mont Aux Sources, at 3282m (10768ft) one of the highest mountains in southern Africa. (B,L,D)

### DAY 6

From the Tugela Falls we walk along the grassy Escarpment crest to the top of Icidi Pass. The route crosses the top of the Amphitheatre, past the Inner Tower and Mount Amery. Today's walk is not too long, allowing us plenty of time to enjoy the incredible views along the Escarpment edge. We camp at the top of Icidi Pass. (B,L,D)

### DAY 7

From Icidi Pass we continue along the Escarpment past Icidi Buttress. We have lunch before continuing past Stimela Ridge and Mbundini Abbey to our dramatic campsite in the Fangs area by the rock features known as the Madonna and her worshippers. Here we can enjoy one of the most photographed views of the Mweni cutback. Again today is not especially long, and our campsite is superbly situated to see the spectacular sunrise views. (B,L,D)

### DAY 8

From Mbundini Abbey we trek to Mponjwane Cave. This is a relatively long day but one of the highlights of the whole trip. The route takes us around the twin towers of Mweni Pinnacles, Mweni Cutback and the top of the Mweni Pass. The route skirts the source of the Orange River and overlooks the Mweni Valley and Needles. We pass the top of Rockeries Pass, with great views across to Cathedral Peak and where we may see herds of cattle making their way up the valley. Some of the trails in this area have been worn by donkeys that are used by marijuana traders! The route passes around the back of the Saddle with its impressive North Peak and sheer east face, and we may wish to make a detour to the summit of this peak. Our camp for the night is at Twins Cave, a huge overhang of rock that has beautiful views of the western range, slightly down from Mlambonja Pass. (B,L,D)

### DAY 9

From Twins Cave we have a long trek and climb up to and over Cleft Peak (3281m/10765ft). From the summit we can look back along most of our route of the previous few days. We descend on the far side of the peak and camp at the top of Organ Pipes Pass. (B,L,D)

### DAY 10

After breakfast we begin the descent from the Escarpment by way of Organ Pipes Pass, down to the Cathedral Peak Hotel. The route follows a fantastic trail which clings to the steep hillside in spectacular situations. It is never particularly exposed but the views looking back to the escarpment and Cathedral Peak are probably the best on the entire trek. After around four hours of continuous descent we reach the trail head where our vehicles will be waiting for us. We drive down into the valey and to the luxurious Cathedral Peak Hotel. After a suitable period of refreshment at the hotel bar, we board our private vehicle for the road journey back to the Cavern Berg Resort. (B,L,D)

### DAY 11

We have a free day at the Cavern Berg Resort. There will be the option, at a small additional cost, to take a game drive at Spioenkop Wildlife Park situated 32km (20 miles) south of Ladysmith. Stretching from the slopes of Spioenkop mountain, of Boer war fame, down acacia thorn covered slopes to ravines and gorges densely filled with valley bushveld, the reserve has rhino, giraffe and a variety of antelope including blue and black wildebeest. If time allows, it may also be possible to visit one of the historic battlefields of the Boer War. (B,D)

### DAY 12

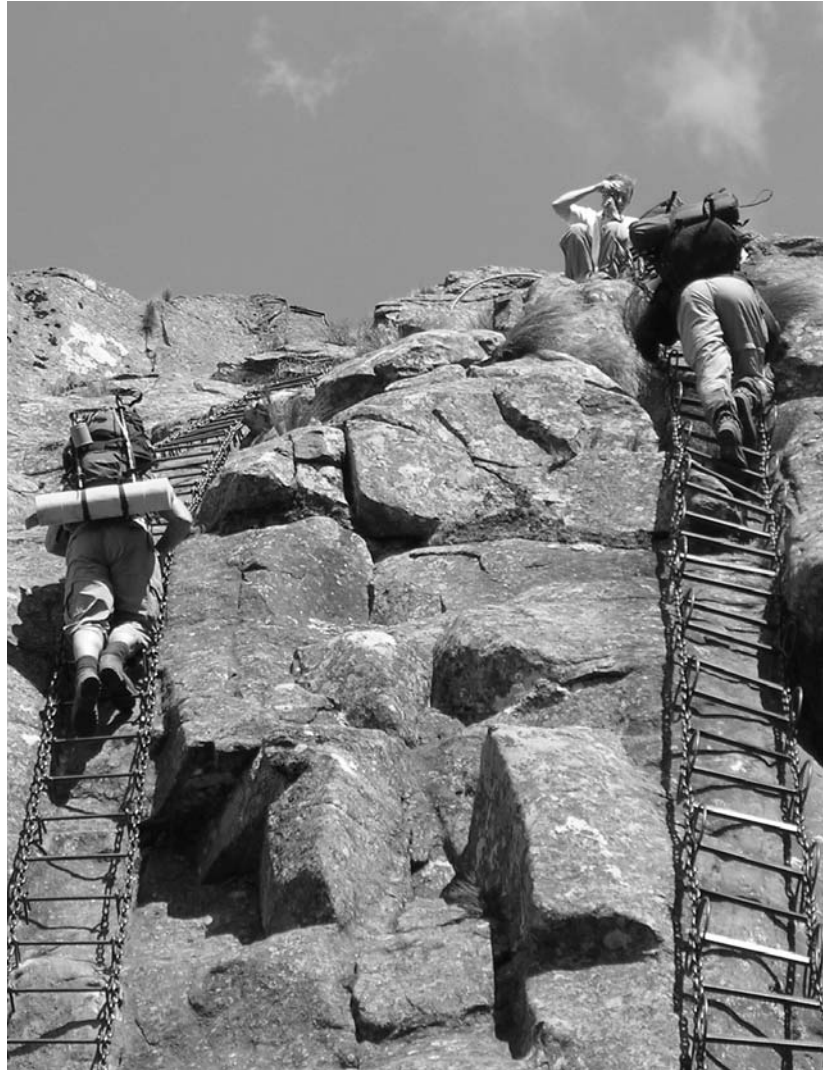
After breakfast we drive back to Johannesburg Airport for our flight home. (B)

### DAY 13

Arrive in the UK.

Looking across to the Tugela Falls





Climbing the Chain Ladder on day 5