



## Drakensberg Adventure

Twelve teenagers and five helpers from South Africa, Norway, Japan, Sweden and Germany ventured on a trip to the mighty Drakensberg Ukhahlamba (Place of Spears) in October 2006. Many did not know each other beforehand.

But they all had at least two things in common:

All of them had lived with the effects of severe burn injuries and they intend to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in June 2007.

### Wild bees' sweet secret

Luckily only one of the youngsters had a known allergy to bee stings—for the first date on our schedule was a stop at **Scrumpy Jacks**, the bee-keeper's. Henry Stewart, professional bee-keeper on the farm, was happy to show the team around his bee hives. He held a short lecture on this useful little insect, teaching them about the different types of bees in the world, how honey bees are organised within the hive, and how the honey is made. Did you know that one bee only makes about a twelfth of a teaspoon of honey in a life time, but yet one bee visits 50 to 1000 flowers in a day?

Scrumpy Jack's honey brittle is said to be the best because it is made of pure honey only.

The kids also got to feed the ponies on the meadow, which caused delight in some and fright in others, so that we had to wonder how on earth we would get them to ride real big horses later that week.

Thanks to Henry Stewart for his time and his kindness, and also to Marelize and Deon Stewart for arranging it all.



Deon's Honey Products:

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### Of delightful hikes, cool water and the "shot too hot to shoot"



The Sterkspruit Falls from a distance

Thick clouds covered the summer sky on the Sunday of our first big hike. The temperature was mild but not too cold. The weather was perfect for our first long hike. In good spirits the group started off on that morning, following the guide Paul Brogan, who had kindly agreed to lead us to the Sterkspruit Falls and the Nandi Falls in the Monk's Cowl area. Paul impressed us all by his knowledge about plants, birds and geology of the Drakensberg, and often he would call in a much appreciated stop to point out a particular flower or tree to the children. He set off some suppressed giggles when he showed us a plant known as "wild dagga" (a cousin of the cannabis plant). He quickly added that "wild dagga" is said to help with stomach pain but has no use as a narcotic.



Exhausted hikers catch their breath on a rock next to the Nandi Waterfall.

When we arrived at the Nandi waterfall, nobody quite wanted to strip and slip into the icy water, which by the way has the same temperature all year through. However when we came to our second big stop by the stream, the morning clouds had cleared up and the bit of sun that broke through the dense trees heated everyone up enough to make them take a dip in the gurgling stream. The splashing and screaming seemed to make a good shot for the camera, so Junius Hughes, the documentary producer from the USA, climbed to the edge of a rock to film some of us having fun in the water. Trying to get the shot perfect, he must have leaned over just a little too far... and fell into the water head first - with his camera! The camera was damaged by water ingress, but Junius immediately made a plan to organise a new one. With his assistant Colleen Larkin and the help

from Rowan Wilkinson, a photographer that had joined the group earlier, he drove to Durban and rented a new camera... missing a day and a half of action. Shortly after the incident, Swedish volunteer Per Herbertsson dropped his still-photo camera into the river, followed by Andani Mphaphuli (16) slipping off a rock and bathing his hiking boot and trousers as he found foot hold in the knee-deep water. The remaining hike took us to a viewpoint of a beautiful waterfall, and no more tumbles challenged the group spirit.

**Thank you to excellent guide Paul Brogan and to the Parks Board for arranging a brilliant lunch.**

Directly after the hike, we drove to Estcourt and visited car fire survivor Shivani Beharilal, who could not participate because she was doing her Matric exams. We all wish to see her on our next trip!



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### Abseiling over the abyss

On a sunny Monday, our youngsters were invited to Four Rivers Rafting, a business that not only organises rafting tours when the rivers are full enough, but also abseiling, quad biking and much more. The day started with a hike to a comparatively nearby cliff, from where we would do abseiling—most of us for the first time. No one chickened-out, but many were close to it. Encouraging as well as teasing comments from the rest of the group prevented everyone from trying to escape and in the end, everybody was glad they had done it. Back at the base Jackie Fourie and her family, who also run the business together, presented us all with cool drinks and hot dogs - a welcome refreshment after the exhausting hike back from the cliff. Next was quad biking. Especially the boys enjoyed racing around the parcours and taking the four wheel bike through the bends in high speed. When it came to mountain boarding though, no one wanted to be first. Like an oversize skateboard with suspension wheels, a mountain board is not easy to ride, and not few of us kissed the dirt in the attempt of rolling across the humps and jumps of the "beginner" track. Lebogang, youngest of the group, came into his own as he managed to keep his balance better than anyone else, and Mfundo was pretty good too. Finally everyone was rewarded with a joyous swing down the "Foofie slide", a long steel cable that was attached to a small platform up the hill and to one at the base. The setting sun gave the race down the rope a magical touch.

**Thanks to Jackie Fourie and her family!**



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### Cheeky ostrich unseats anxious Lebohng

After an exhausting day in the sun, horse riding was next on the schedule. Almost no one had sat on a horse before, and the kids shot sceptical glances to the horses and each other. The optimistic wrangler tried to teach them some basics about horse riding, but just seemed to confuse everyone even more. To the relief of some and regret of others the horses were to be mounted by a small platform with stairs to it. This way at least nobody had to face the shame of falling before it even began. Lebohng however was not that lucky. His horse calmly wandered off to the water basin, where a lazy ostrich was taking its nap. Interrupted by the approach of the big and scary horse approach it jumped up and stepped away

cautiously. The horse jumped up too, and almost sent poor Lebohng sailing down into a big puddle. He could only just hold on and was then plucked off by Rowan. Lebohng then refused to remount this fearsome creature and also any other horse in the stable. He should have been persuaded but our optimistic wrangler was urging to leave as he had to keep his schedule.

The ride was beautiful. It took us through the nearer parts of the mountains through green fields and dark green forest, and everyone had at least one trot. In the end it seemed they did not want to get off their horses just so quickly.

## Eyes up! Cliffhangers falling slowly

The fact that the whole group had done abseiling already did not keep Marnus from taking us to the resort's own abseiling point on a hot and sunny Wednesday morning. The cliff was definitely not smaller than the previous one, and Linda was suddenly drowsy from the hot sun and preferred not to do abseiling today. Tristan managed to escape by assisting the climbers at the bottom of the cliff, until his pride sent him back upwards to get his own abseil over and done with. Junius put off the suggestion of abseiling with the camera in his hand and kept to the ground far below. Rowan took amazing shots of Bongani, who would not let his missing left underarm keep him from climbing down a steep cliff for the second time in his life.

There was a secret sigh of relief in most when it became clear that this was the last abseiling adventure, though to be fair Londeka never uttered a word of fear and would gladly have done it again for sure.



## Staying at Dragon Peaks Mountain Resort

The Dragon Peaks Mountain Resort is set in the beautiful valley beneath Champagne Castle, one of the highest summits in the area. The resort offers...

Glenn Tungay, who is part of the family run business, arranged for the Children of Fire team to stay at the air force dormitories for free.

A kitchen, a big hall, more than enough bedrooms and bathrooms and a field for playing soccer satisfied everyone's needs. The huge swimming pool down the lane was perfect for cooling down after long days in the sun.

**Thank you to Glenn Tungay and his family!**



**For more information** Tel: +27 36 468 1031

Dragon Peaks Park, P.O. Box Winterton 3340, Kwazulu Natal, Republic of South Africa

## Falcon Ridge

The birds of prey from the Drakensberg Falcon Ridge were surprisingly tame when the falcon trainer made them perform all sorts of stunning moves to demonstrate the way they hunt. While falcon, owl and vulture flew and dove and floated, their trainer explained to the breathless spectators how falcons



were already used for hunting some hundred years ago. The vulture uses thermals to stay in the air for several hours without beating its wings.

Mittah Lebaka (17) had an owl land on her gloved hand and admired how harmless the bird seemed that had just showed everyone its excellent hunting skills.

The young vulture however was less obliging and tackled the bags of people in the audience once he had finished his chicken necks. No-one was sure whether to laugh or be scared. After the vicious vulture had driven several people off their seats he was gathered up and carried back to his cage—and as he hopped in another vulture hopped out.

We left it to our heroic falconers to take care of him.

**Thank you to the Falcon Ridge Drakensberg!**

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## Drakensberg Boys Choir

Just up the road from our own accommodation at the Dragon Peaks Mountain Resort, the renowned Drakensberg Boys Choir has its school.

A small concert was booked in the time we were there. And we were lucky—the choir invited us to listen to their songs alongside many other guests that had travelled from all over the country to listen to the boys.

In the first half, the choir rehearsed their Christmas Carols for a tour in December. They also sang some contemporary songs that were well known to most generations.

After the break the choir reappeared in colourful outfits and gum boots. They gave lively performance of a collection of African songs, with dance, drums and drama; one piece was about the sounds of the veld at night: Rain, owls, toads, crickets, imitated with the voice and tongue.

Later, chorister Keagan van Til introduced himself to us as a burns survivor.

Thank you for this wonderful afternoon,  
Drakensberg Boys Choir!

[www.dbchoir.co.za](http://www.dbchoir.co.za)

## Hanging out with the King of the Amangwane

The Amangwane are a people native to parts of the Southern Drakensberg. It is more than 200 years older than the Zulu tribe. They live in former Natal, and their people are some 3 million strong. Their King, Albert Hlongwane and his Prime Minister Sydney Ngwenya agreed to be host to our group on a Thursday morning. We were welcomed in a grand and glorious ceremony in the King's traditional Rondavel, which represented only one section of his premises. The praise singer of the king and Prime Minister Ngwenya performed a traditional Amangwane dance, and Kjetil Havnen, a 17-year-old boy from Norway who had burnt his face in a motorbike crash, presented the King with a steel cheese slicer,

that had ancient Norwegian symbols carved into it. Many questions were asked and many answers given. After the formal part of the meeting, the King surprisingly invited the whole group for lunch at his more modern house. As everyone was feasting on rice, chicken and vegetable stew, the atmosphere became more relaxed and the royals ended up laughing and joking with our team. It truly was an inspirational visit and few South Africans can boast with having met a real king. Children of Fire found a novel way to thank the King—see future newsletters for details.



Praise singer and prime minister perform the traditional Amangwane dance



King Albert Hlongwane

## Eland effigies stalk through San history

After this fairly cultural interlude, the winding roads of Emaus took us to another place of history: The Didima Rock Art Centre, a museum in the midst of the mountains, where the San walked decades ago. It displayed rock and cave paintings from the San, and also showed some tools and weapons used by this ancient people. One could also read about the history of the San in the Drakensberg Ukhahlamba.

In a dark cave with a flickering fake fire we could all listen to stories told by the San in the old days. A short movie in a big dark hall which also looked like a cave, seemed to make the San come back to live.

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## Soccer

Soccer belongs into every trip that includes teenagers. The big field in front of our dormitories was not to be left unused. With a soccer ball lent by Marnus, a game was set for Thursday afternoon.

Horse dung and molehills made playing more interesting, and plastic chairs served as goalposts perfectly well. Keagan the chorister joined us.

The energetic match lasted until one after another dropped out from exhaustion. Linda never seemed to get tired though and powered on till the end.



Linda, Bongani and Mittah chasing after the ball.

## The Tent

The whole team was to stay in tents until a donor let us down... but Junius came well prepared, and had brought a small tent in case he got lost in the middle of the mountains and had to feed on roots and berries until he was found... this never happened, but the tent was then used to test the pitching skills of our teenagers —after all, tents is what you sleep in when you climb Kilimanjaro.

Everyone struggled to understand the instructions, and only after several failed attempts of thrusting the poles into the wrong position, and with help from other volunteers, did the tent end up looking like a tent, ready to provide shelter for poor lost souls or otherwise naughty boys who needed a break from the hectic environment in the upstairs dormitory. They had horses looking in.

## Kilimanjaro is next

In June 2007 the teenagers who here already mastered the Drakensberg adventure will climb Mount Kilimanjaro.

They will be joined by burn survivors from Kenya, Ethiopia, Cameroon and from other countries all over the world.

With a flaming torch they will set a sign to raise awareness of burn injuries and their way to deal with the consequences.

Children of Fire needs sponsors for airfares, trekking equipment, passports and much more.

If are interested in supporting this project, you can email Children of Fire directly ([firechildren@icon.co.za](mailto:firechildren@icon.co.za)) or phone +27 11 726 6529.

## Patients meet surgeons amid the mountains

The Champagne Sports Resort sponsored four people of our team three nights at one of their chalets as well as dinner and breakfast for each of these nights.

As every night a different quartet went to stay at the chalet, each of the youngsters had a chance to experience a night in the classy ambience of the hotel. They admired beautiful paintings displayed in the long hall way, tried the exotic menu of delicacies in the buffet and chatted to the kind waitress who served their table. Later on they met some of their former plastic surgeons strolling around with wives and cocktails. The Annual Congress of the Association of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons of South Africa (APRSSA) was held on the three consecutive days that our burn survivors were guests of the hotel. Most surgeons still remembered their patients well and took some time to catch up with them. Paranoid secretarial staff were heavy handed (or maybe just heavy) and prevented some surgeons from a unique chance to present South African surgery to the world, in Junius Hughes' documentary.

However we would like to express our utmost thanks to **Champagne Sports Resort** for kindly providing their chalet, three excellent dinners and breakfasts and their wide range of sporting facilities for our team.

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## Tranquility is tough to teach

Rowan Wilkinson the photographer is a multi-faceted man who also heals humans and animals. He told us about a meditation programme that he would like to do with us. This programme was simply an audio record of a voice giving instructions, and relaxing music in the background. It was supposed to make you feel good and free afterwards.

Partly out of curiosity, we agreed to listen to his record. The voice—a male voice—said things like "Inhale, exhale". "Take all your fears and throw them out into the ocean". Soft guitar music and the regular gushing of the waves added to the atmosphere of calamity.

For first language English speakers, the meditation would probably have worked quite well. However, thirteen of the seventeen people in our group spoke English as a second or third language. Words like "inhale" and "exhale" do not belong to the vocabulary

of most. In addition, some have never known to sit still and listen for such a long period of time. The younger ones not only had a problem with understanding the instructions, but also were quite puzzled about the use of this whole event. Bongani, after giggling for several minutes through, fell asleep on the table. Linda, who has almost no understanding of English, sat relatively still but just looked out the window. But it should be mentioned that for most of these kids, sitting still for another reason but being in class was probably unheard of — yet they managed. They did not meditate the way they were hoped to, but they did the first step: sitting still.

Rowan told us that he was working on a Zulu version of this record. Maybe next time we go there, he will show it to us. And maybe, by then, our teenagers have grown a little and will try a little harder.

## *Children of Fire — the latest documentary*

*Junius Hughes and his assistant from the USA, joined the teenagers on all their adventures, as they took footage for a documentary about Children of Fire and burn injuries in South Africa.*

*Junius and his team will also be part of the Kilimanjaro climb in June 2007.*



## Swedish Sushi und Sauerkraut

The teenagers had gathered from different countries, and the helpers also came together from all over the world. Koichi Morita, a business economics student from Japan, and special needs teacher Per Herbertsson from Sweden were an excellent team in the kitchen and when they did not put another delicious meal together they supervised the youngsters when they tried their mass cooking skills. Per also drove one of the two kombi buses, provided by Imperial Car Hire. (Tel: 011 574 1234)

The other one was driven by Marietta Neumann, a gap year student from Germany. Tristan Jones, youngest UMashesha volunteer and South African resident, made a good link between the children and the adults as he "officially" belonged to both. Bronwen Jones, last but not least, was the stable and reliable component of the group, and even as the oldest participant she too abseiled down dangerous cliffs at Dragon Peaks.

## Firelight Dragon Stories and Marshmallows

To keep the brains of our young adventurers going, they were each given a very special assignment. They had to write a short story with a dragon in it. When first told, they did not quite seem to believe it, but when the penalty for not handing in a story was announced, they quickly made up their minds and set to work. Nobody quite fancied sleeping in the tent with toads and snakes and grasshoppers.

Wild ideas presented in their minds, and while one girl associated dragons with dragon flies, one of the

boys told a story of drunk dragons who had to face a bitter punishment for destroying the wizard's garden — the moral: Don't drink and fly.

In the evening, sitting around a big flickering fire thanks to ever-helpful Marnus, everyone read their stories out loud while the listeners could indulge both in the interesting tales and some creamy hot marshmallows. Public speaking skill grew under the night sky: it was a new experience for most to link education with fun.



## Dragon Stories

My name is Bongani Madlala. I am going to tell you about the dragons, and the dragons are the very biggest in the world. And I want to see the dragons, but the dragons are very dangerous sometimes. To make it even harder you must be careful that they don't attack you. If they do you must run as fast as you can and sometimes they irritate you and you get angry and want to go.

You can go if you had enough of them, you can go to relax on your bed and you can go feed them outside. The dragons are the best animals in the world because the dragons are the biggest animals in the world. But they lived a very long time ago. They did like to sleep, and if you have them as a pet you must take care of it and you must be careful that they don't attack you and you must feed them if they are hungry and dragons like to eat too much and that's why all people did not like the dragons and that's why they killed them, because they did not like that the dragons were eating everything. The people did kill them because they had babies to feed, others they could not survive. They would be dead. We were going to die and we wouldn't be in the world, it would only be the dragons.

By Bongani Madlala

### Dragons in the mountains

Once upon a time somewhere in South Africa, there were these big, beautiful mountains that were between the borders of South Africa and Lesotho. Those mountains were named after a Dragon so those mountains were called the Dragon Mountains (Drakensberg Mountains).

And one day in the berg there came a group of youngsters and they were three boys and three girls and the girls' names were: Lerato, Bianca and Katlego. The boys' names were: Siphon, Neo and Pule. Well one Sunday morning the teenagers decided to visit a mountain called the Dragon Peaks; for a three hour hike and just for swim in the little small rivers of the peak. Then it was about 7 o'clock in the morning and they began their hike and as they were walking they decided to stop and have snacks and take photos.

Well while they were still hiking Siphon decided to stand up and go a little faster or a bit forward than everybody else, well they gave him a chance to do that. After some few minutes Katlego recalled that Siphon had gone for quite a long time so they decided to try and find him somewhere or try to track his foot steps.

So when they tried to find him, Siphon called out and said : "Guys come, come and look!" And they responded and they all said "What?"

And Siphon said: "Guys, I just found a very interesting small fly and it is very, very unusual, so guys please come and help me".

Then the guys came to see what was going on with Siphon, what he's found, and if they might have a solution to the problem. Everybody thought that Siphon had found a precious stone from the river.

Well, the guys got where Siphon was but when they saw what Siphon had found it was very surprising because they expected to see something so they had to do something about it. And none of the kids knew what it was so they had to find somewhere for help and at that point the only help they had was to go back and seeking help from the tour guides.

They got to the tour guides and showed him what they have found. And they got a chance to once more speak to the tour guide and he told them that it was a dragon fly.

And Katlego said: "Guys, remember when we came in here through the main entrances?" They said: "Yes." So Katlego said: "You know what guys, what we passed on the main entrance, it was a dragon fly." And they all said: "Yes, it was, I recognised it by its legs and its head." And they all went "Yes".

The tour guide told the guys that they need to be aware that the Drakensberg mountains has loads and loads of dragon flies so they might as well get used to the idea of having dragon flies any time of the day in the berg and dragon flies are not even scary they are just normal flies so try to learn more about them and have fun.

By Mittah Lebaka



## San secret in the rain

Teenagers are not early risers and dawn drizzle doesn't help... But the final morning's reward for the energetic girls was to see *real* San paintings in a cave known only to a privileged few. Many of the boys lagged behind on the hike, but thanks to Rowan for sharing this secret treasure.

Thank you for taking beautiful pictures throughout the trip.

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COPYRIGHT: Pictures taken by Rowan Wilkinson, Koichi Morita, Colleen Larkin and Marietta Neumann.

## Participants

Andani Mphaphuli, 16, from Sibasa, Venda. He was intentionally set alight by his stepfather some three years ago.

Londeka Ngidi, 14, travelling from Pietermaritzburg was burned on the scalp and arm with boiling water as a toddler.

Bongani Madlala, 14, from Howick was burned as a three month old baby when a candle fell onto his pillow. The charity funds him attending a boarding school due to a volatile domestic situation.

Jeffers Zitha, 15, from Leratong was bereaved and burned from a paraffin stove explosion some six years ago.

Mittah Lebaka, 17, from Soweto was burned several years ago after warming herself next to an electric stove and her clothes catching fire.

Linda Tshabalala, 17, from Hammanskraal was burned due to untreated epilepsy, a fit triggered by the flickering flames of an open fire that she fell into as a seven year old. She only started school at age 13 after the charity's intervention.

Mfundo Ntamehlo, 20, from Alexandra was burned when people threw thinners onto an imbawula (brazier) to make it burn faster, when he was 11 years old. His education was delayed due to his injuries so in 2006 he is in grade 11, one year off Matric.

Kjetil Havnen, 17, from Norway was burned through a motorcycle accident.

Ole-Petter Goa, 16, from Norway was burned when his school tried to re-enact historical events from the Second World War including the intentional burning of people in ovens, and despite all the protective clothing the event went terribly wrong.

Lebohang Motseki, 13, from Bloemfontein played with fire in the veld, when one of his friends mistook petrol for water as he tried to extinguish the flames. The blaze severely injured his legs.

Keagan van Til, 13, is a student of the Drakensberg Boys Choir. He was burnt with hot water as an infant and knew about Children of Fire from a billboard he saw in Johannesburg. He wanted to meet the group and spent an afternoon getting to know the other teenagers.

*We would like to say Thank You to everyone who helped to make this trip happen. Your support gave these teenagers a lifetime experience.*

**If you want to help the teenagers to reach the roof of Africa, you can sponsor a child or part of their equipment.**

### Estimated costs:

Flights ± R7000

Park fees ± R5000

Equipment, guides, visas, passports ± R8000

Bank details can be found on the Children of Fire website: [www.firechildren.org](http://www.firechildren.org)

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