

Skoorsteenberg July 21 - 23

Convenor: Claus Riding

Meet report: Dennis Lange



I was initially drawn to this venture in the Tankwa Karoo by the original meet description of an exploration of a kloof. This was later amended to an ascent of Skoorsteenberg.

The group size was deliberately limited to six due to limited accommodation. We left Ceres at 12:30, and proceeded to the Tankwa Padstal, where we partook of lunch. Sitting on the verandah we were actually hot, despite this being the middle of winter.

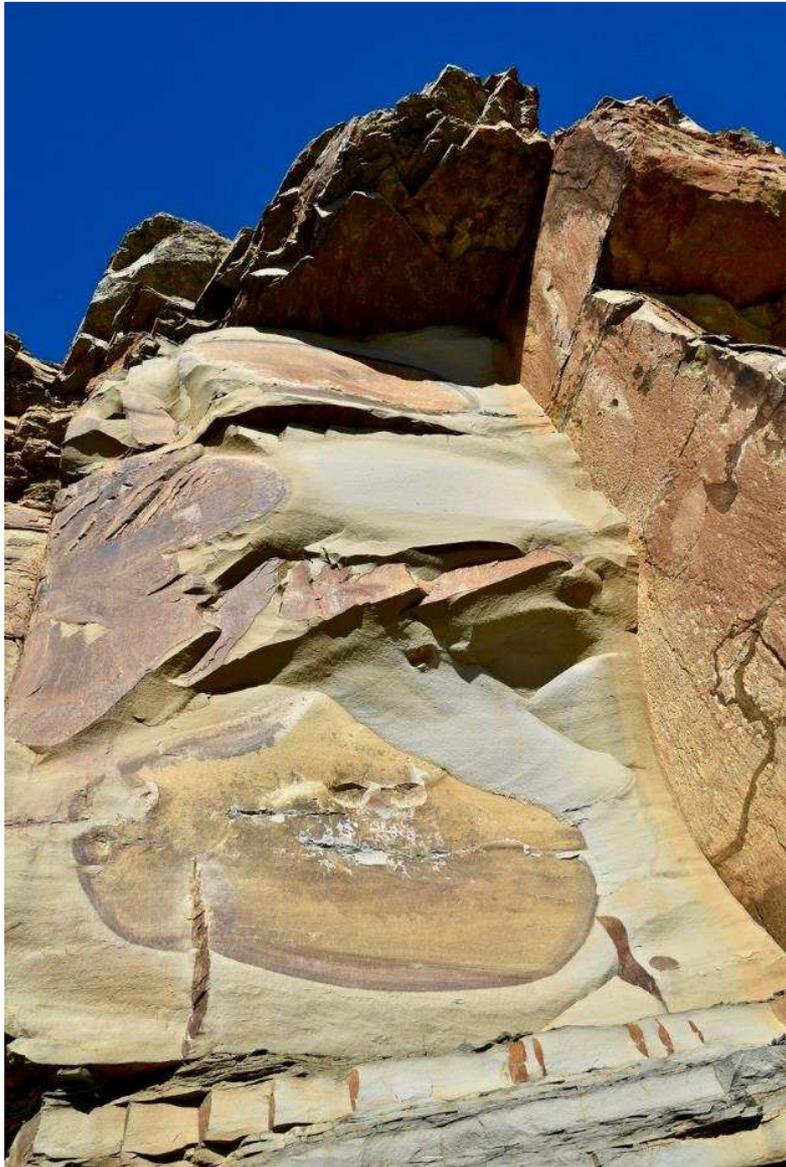
We were greeted at the farm by the owner and his wife. The cottage we had hired was spotlessly clean, but smelled of gas – an odour which was still noticeable on Saturday and Sunday morning. Each time I lit the gas stove I looked forward to being blasted across the room, as once happened to a friend of mine, but sadly I was not blown away.

We were a very sociable group, and deep discussions ranging from atoms and ants to boyfriends, girlfriends, and the universe were had around the dinner-table on the stoep where we sat even though it was rather chilly. I suspect that Claus derived a modicum of warmth from attending to the braai below the verandah.

On Saturday we drove for a couple of kilometers to the start of the hike. At 09:30 Margaret, Barbara and I headed for the Skoorsteenberg, while Claus and Maretha explored the kloof, which apparently is not spectacular.

Claus and I were sure that I had previously climbed Skoorsteenberg, but I remembered nothing of the place. The initial ascent was steep, loose, and rough. Walking on the plateau was easy as the vegetation is sparse. There are amazing rock-formations along a lengthy traverse. It is a geologist's paradise, and one can take many great photographs there. [*Dennis sent me 60 – Claus*]





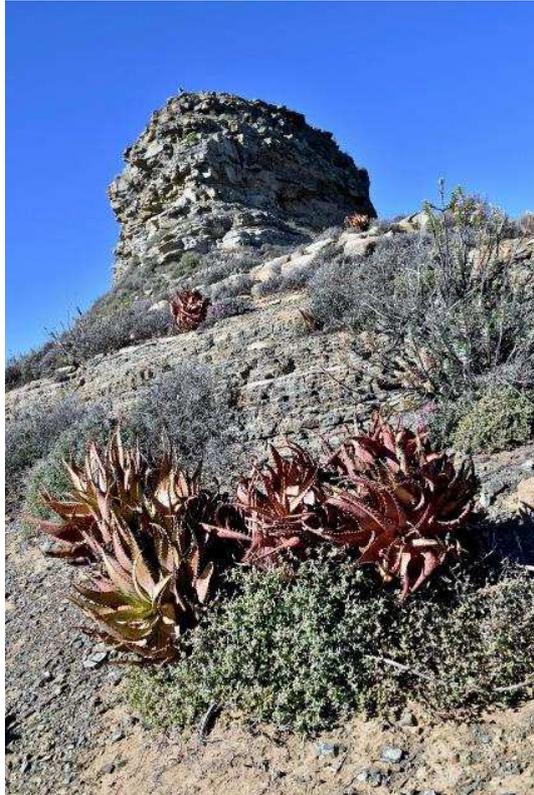
The final approach to the summit is rather daunting as the ground again becomes rather steep, loose, and exposed. I had quite a nerve to insist that we all tackle this last bit. Somehow, we kept our nerve (one nerve shared equally amongst the three of us), and completed the ascent, full-well knowing that we would be rather nervous while down-climbing that nerve-racking section later.



The weather was perfect, with a slight cool breeze on the summit – not enough to require any extra layers of clothes. It is always wonderful to gaze around from the top of a mountain, and in this instance, we had grand views of the Cedarberg and the entire Tankwa region.



We tackled the first part of decent with some trepidation, and it was not as daunting as we had anticipated. That was followed by long stretches of steep, loose ground where one had to be sure of one's footing. We again enjoyed the amazing traverse, with its spectacular rock structures and strange patterns.



We investigated the possibility of following a ridge down, but very soon it appeared to be leading us off a cliff, and preferring to stay alive we elected to retrace our route of ascent down the mountain.



We finished at 15:30, and much to our surprise found an identical vehicle to Claus' parked next to ours, exactly where Claus had parked his bakkie. That was a unique coincidence.

Back at the cottage we were able to enjoy a hot shower (one each), followed by convivial conversations over dinner in the icy night air on the stoep.



It was pleasant being able to pack up on Sunday at a leisurely pace. When we stopped along the Tankwa road to take a photograph Claus saw that I had a flat tyre, and was extremely helpful in changing it. After driving for another kilometer or so I had another puncture. Fortunately, I had a second spare wheel. Back home I discovered a third flat tyre. As two of the tyres are write-offs I had to buy four new tyres – a small price to pay for an unforgettable journey into the magical Tankwa Karoo.

It is probably less expensive to charter a plane to the Tankwa Karoo, but perhaps that idea won't fly.....