

3rd National Senior Scout Adventure - Great Winterhoek - 1976/77



Over the New Year, Alex Jochheim and myself were lucky enough to take part in the Winterhoek Adventure. We were placed in Patrol No. 5 which consisted of seven other Scouts, four from 1st Constantia, two from 1st Strand and one from 2nd Green & Sea Point.



Before I relate our experiences, something about the area. The Great Winterhoek Mountains is a forestry area under the control of the Government Department of Forestry located in the Cape, 110 km N.E. of Cape Town at the head of the historic Tulbach wine-growing valley and 15 km S.E. of Porterville approximately 25 km long and 17 km wide, it is a huge stretch of rugged mountains cut by spectacular kloofs altitude varies from 300m to 2065 m on the summit of the Great Winterhoek Peak.

The adventure began at approximately 7.15 am on the morning of 28th December, when the buses towing trailers filled with our rucksacks, left Cape Town station bound for the drop off point at the foot of the Winterberg Mountains.

On arrival we changed into hiking togs and set out for base-camp which was situated in a valley about 3hours hike from the drop off point. We were met half-way by oranges and Game cool drink.

After spending the rest of the afternoon lazing around HQ. the Expedition Leaders were summoned to a briefing session with the Trips Planner, Colin Inglis. He welcomed us and gave us more details, including our itinerary for the adventure.

Supper was followed by a camp-fire attended by all participating in the adventure. It was kept short due to the fact that we had to leave early the next morning for our different bases. Eventually Chris (1st Constantia) Alex and myself joined the sleeping bodies of Patrol No 5 at 12.30 a.m.

First on our agenda, was kloofing. Kloofing consists of descending a valley and following the course of the river, during which time, one has to jump waterfalls float one's pack on a lilo and swim across pools.

We were scheduled to spend two days and one night in the kloof, but Mother Nature had other ideas. We set off on the first day in ideal conditions, hot sunny weather with crystal clear water in which to cool off. The day went well and we enjoyed negotiating a high waterfall just before lunch. This particular point is marked on the map as "Die Hell". The afternoon was spent boulder hopping down the river with the occasional "swim". At 6.30pm we selected a beautiful camping place in which to spend the night. There was an overhang almost large enough to contain the whole patrol and by suspending a tent and flysheet we had all the shelter we needed.



We had just started eating our meal when it began to rain. At the time we thought nothing of it and by ten we fell asleep with the sound of rushing water in our ears. In the morning a changed kloof awaited us. The river had risen by 1½ metres. The water was no longer crystal clear but had turned into a foaming white torrent. It could have been too dangerous to try boulder-hopping any further so we studied our maps and decided to climb up the bank and attempt to reach the Pioneering Base by going over the top.

It was tough going as we had to traverse up and down the banks, during which time it rained solidly. By lunch time we had reached a ridge from where we could see our destination. We back tracked a little to have lunch out of the driving rain and wind. After eating we carried on but once again ran into trouble. A thick mist had come up and we could no longer see where we were going. To be on the safe side we decided to go back down to the river and do our best to go around the edge of the water. This was easier said than done and at one point we had to lower our packs by rope and climb down a rock face. By 6 p.m. we were still a long way from our destination and everyone agreed that we would have to spend another night in the kloof. Dusk was setting in when we eventually found shelter by which time we were beginning to suffer from exhaustion and cold. After a few finger full's of peanut-butter and half a guava, all we wanted was sleep.

We put up a two man tent into which four squeezed and another four crawled under a small overhang. But there were 9 of us, the ninth being none other than Alex. After jokingly threatening to jump off the nearest cliff he eventually piled into the tent; five in a two man hike tent! (Scouts Honour). As you can imagine we spent the most uncomfortable night of our lives that night. Those under the overhang were soaked by the rain and those in the tent were soaked by condensation. But in the morning we were still alive. We dragged our ourselves out and put on wet clothing. Some even had to wring out their sleeping bags before packing them away.

We moved off before breakfast in order to warm up. At nine we stopped for breakfast, eating our previous evening's supper. Slowly the weather cleared and the valley widened, thus checking some of the force of the river. We were able to strip down to shorts, raincoats and takkies and wade along the edge of the water. At 1 p.m. we spied what we thought was a fisherman in the distance but as we got closer we saw that in fact his fishing rod was an aerial. He turned out to be a member of a rescue party. Half an hour later we reached the Pioneering Base, tired and hungry.



Shortly after our arrival we saw army helicopters flying overhead in the direction of the kloof. We discovered that a Rhodesian patrol had got stuck on the mountain and that their leader and another member had fallen and were injured. Subsequently they were taken to Groote Schuur hospital for treatment.

We spent the afternoon drying out our clothes in the sun and searching for Pioneering equipment that had been washed down the river in the flood. Later we discovered that 7 inches of rain had fallen, in just over 24 hours

The following morning we began our pioneering project. We built a bridge across the river by placing large trestles made from cut-down trees and by lashing scaffolding planks across them.

Transport taking us to the Water Activities Base at Voëlvlei was delayed because the trucks had broken down but we eventually arrived there several hours late.

The following day we spent canoeing and sailing in Saldanha dinghies. It was rather disappointing as we didn't get a chance to sail the dinghies ourselves. In order to make their day more exciting one of the Constantia scouts and Alex plucked up enough courage to ask two pretty young girls if they could borrow their yacht. The answer was "yes" but to their chagrin the girls didn't accompany them.

After Voëlvlei we were supposed to go to the Mountaineering Base but it had been closed because of the rain. Instead were taken to DutchOven Cooking and Rock Climbing which were situated close together. We had been looking forward to a good meal and that is exactly what; we had, It consisted of roast chicken, roast potatoes and carrots. To top it all, we had baked apple pie afterwards - scrummy.

Rock climbing was hairy but interesting. We had expert instruction on the equipment and the technique used in rock climbing. We then carried out a short climb and abseiled down a face of rock.

The following morning we set out for the Commando Base. It was at this time that our patrol was injured. We were simply following a path when John (1st Constantia) slipped and fell badly hurting his wrist. We strapped it up tightly.

After that it was off the H.Q. to visit the different bases set in that area The first was Archery. After a brief history on the subject and then strict instructions we shot at targets from different distances. Alex proved to be the best archer winning on points: ; We then followed a short hunting course , shooting at cardboard buck hidden in the bush.

The next morning we went to Field Biology for a study on conservation and ecology from experts followed by setting traps to catch wild animals. To everyone's surprise, mice and a mongoose were caught.

At this stage John was taken to hospital to have his wrist x-rayed. It was found to be broken and was set in plaster.

The next base we visited was Orienteering, which was under the direction of Kevin Wall, known to the Cubs as "Pha0'. Kevin had laid on something new in the sport - orienteering by walkie-talkie. This meant that one team with a map guided another team without a map.

The last day was spent at the Marksmanship Base. Once again after strict instructions we were allowed to shoot. We shot at standing targets with pistols and then at clay-pigeons with shotguns. Robert (1st Strand.) shot the most clay-pigeons and I scored the most points for revolver shooting.

We were then transported back to H.Q. to attend the second campfire and closing ceremony. I cannot describe on paper the spirit that was felt by all present on that last night.

After a parade and after cleaning up the next morning we set out for our pick up point. There we were met by the buses and taken back to Cape Town Station. We arrived back rather tired and dirty but having had a most enjoyable experience that will not be forgotten for a long time.



Graham Symmonds
Expedition Leader.