SPHINX HIKING TRAIL

Moolmanshoek Private Game Reserve
Ficksburg/Rosendal

Maximum number of hikers: 20
Distance/Duration: 2 days/nights. Day 1: 15 km, Day 2: 7 km.
Degree of difficulty: Average.
Overnight facilities:
Comfortable hikers accommodation at the **base camp** at Langesnek: 3 rooms accommodating 6-8 people each, and if needed overflow accommodation in the dormitory. Kitchen: Electricity, pots, pans, stove, fridge. Basic cutlery and crockery are supplied. Ablutions: 2 toilets. 2 showers, basins and one bath. Next to the hut is a lapa with fireplace/ braai area. A part of the lapa is under cover and enclosed. Splash pool (not fenced). Braai facilities and one bag of wood supplied. Extra bags of wood available at R100/bag.

Overnight hut (Sphinx Mountain Hut): 20 beds and mattresses, two flush toilets, cold showers, gas geyser for hot water, braai grid, two kettles, cast iron potjie. Limited supply of wood.
Pertinent information: Accommodation shared with all other trails on Moolmanshoek**.**

TRAIL OPEN: 1 OCTOBER – 31 MAY

Location of trail: 41 km from Ficksburg, 230 km from Bloemfontein, 340 km from Gauteng

Cost:
Please contact Niklaas Arangies at nik@moolmanshoek.co.za to confirm rates.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

The Sphinx trail is situated in the Moolmanshoek Private Game Reserve in the Eastern Free State, between Ficksburg and Rosendal. The base camp is located at the Langesnek Leadership Centre, from where hikers will commence their hike.

The starting point of the trail is just behind the dormitories where it crosses the fence and sets off in a southerly direction past a few large bluegum trees and then cross open grassland. It then crosses a stretch of open grassland. After passing through a grove op bluegum trees and a stile, it runs alongside a wire fence and starts descending towards the Moolmanshoek valley, gradually revealing the beautiful mountains surrounding this valley. Further on, the route joins the road going down to the Lodge and follows it for about 200 meters. Where the road bends right towards the lodge, the trail veers to the left, passing a grove of pine trees on your right and then crosses a steel bridge over the “spruit”. Beyond the bridge, it turns sharp right and follows the “spruit” before passing through a large grove of poplar trees with the seats of the “forest chapel” visible. It then turns left and crosses an open field before crossing another “spruit”.

The trail then moves gradually uphill along the lane of bluegum trees where the burrows and diggings of porcupines are evident in many places. It then moves closer to the mountain where hikers can enjoy a lovely view across the Moolmanshoek valley and the “Mini-Serengeti” plain where herds of zebra, black wildebeest, springbok, hartebeest, blesbuck and eland can be seen. Other game that might be seen, include mountain reedbuck, duiker and

steenbuck. There are many bird species along the trail and black eagles nest up against the cliffs of Visierskerf. There is a rich variety of wild flowers and ferns.

The trail then approaches a huge rock on the mountain slope and traverses the upper parts of the “Serengeti” game area. The route then moves into the mountains, hugging the contours, before arriving at a ravine with a natural swimming hole, the “Spiraalgat”, shaped like a spiral or upside-down ice-cream cone. Thereafter the trail winds around the ridge to arrive at the Witgatbad, another nice swimming hole. This is the perfect spot to stop for tea. The trail then gradually ascends the opposite slope to reach the Neck, from where a great view towards the east, as far as the mountains at Golden Gate, can be enjoyed. At this stage, hikers who wish to climb to the summit of Visierskerf mountain (2 407 m) can leave their backpacks behind and follow the signs on the game fence running up the ridge. For your effort, you will be rewarded with a magnificent view across the Eastern Free State and the Maluti Mountains in Lesotho. This side trip will take at least 2 hours to complete.

From the Neck the trail follows the contours around the Sphinx and Jacobsberg and crosses wooded slopes with dense indigenous trees and shrubs. Beyond Jacobsberg, the descend starts towards another ravine with sparkling water. Further on, the trail goes through thick indigenous forest and past beautiful potholes to arrive at the Sphinx overnight mountain hut. The hut is just above a nice pool, where weary hikers can cool off. You can also use the Waterfall Shower, just beyond the fireplace/braai area. Or you can walk down to the big dam to watch the water birds.

The second day’s hike is a very easy hike that follows a jeep track until a right turn takes you towards the base camp at Langesnek.

There is a much harder option available that takes you up the slope opposite the Sphinx Hut and follows the contours beneath the two Pyramid Mountains. You will pass a big cave that was previously used as a kraal for 500 goats. A local story has it that this cave was used as an arsenal during the Anglo Boer War. A bit further on, you can have a nice rest in the shade at Dassie Podium. The trail then continues along the contours below the two Pyramids, past Aunt Mitchell’s Overhang and gradually descends, before it contours around the mountain spur back to base camp.

Energetic hikers can also climb the First Pyramid from the sign alongside the trail, just before you get to Aunt Mitchell’s Overhang. This is quite a steep climb and will take 1½ hours on average to go up and down. On a hot day, hikers can also take a detour to the large fountain-fed swimming pool before returning to Langesnek. This will add an extra 1,5 km to your hike. To get to the pool, take the “Lodge” route beyond Aunt Mitchell’s Overhang and when you reach the road running to the lodge, turn left immediately and follow the footprints until you cross the spruit. Then go straight ahead towards the pool.