WATERKLOOF HIKING TRAIL
Ficksburg/Rosendal

Maximum number of hikers: 20
Length/Duration: 22 km for the 2-day/night trail. 37 km for the 3-day/2-night trail.
Optional circular routes to mountain peaks: 8 km). 1st day: 16 km. 2nd day: 14 km (2-day trail); 9 km (3-day trail). 3rd day: 7 km.
Degree of difficulty: Average to difficult.
Overnight facilities:
Comfortable hikers' accommodation at the **base camp at Langesnek** hikers hut: 3 rooms accommodating 6 people each, plus space in dormitory. Kitchen: Electricity, pots, pans, stove, fridge. Please supply own cutlery and crockery. Ablutions: 2 toilets, 2 showers, basins and one bath. Adjacent is the fireplace with part of the lapa under cover and enclosed. Swimming pool (not fenced). Braai facilities and limited wood.
Barolong overhang cave: very basic facilities: Supply own groundsheets and mattresses. Three rooms for shelter, or sleep near fire/under overhang. Braai grids, large kettle, one cast iron pot. Some water available in containers, or from mountain stream below. Two pit toilets.
Sphinx Mountain Hut (three-day trail): 22 beds and mattresses, two flush toilets, cold showers, gas geyser for showers only, braai lapa, braai grid, two kettles, cast iron potjie. Limited supplied of wood.
Pertinent information: Accommodation shared with all other trails on Moolmanshoek**.**

Pertinent information:
No rubbish collection at Barolong cave. Please take out what you have brought in. **No mattresses** supplied in the cave. Accommodation at base camp may have to be shared with all other trail users in the Moolmanshoek Game Reserve and depends on availability.
TRAILS OPEN: 1 OCTOBER - 31 MAY
Location of trail: 35 km from Ficksburg, 230 km from Bloemfontein, 340 km from Gauteng.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

The Waterkloof trail is situated in the Moolmanshoek Private Game Reserve in the Eastern Free State between Ficksburg and Rosendal. The trail follows the slopes of the two most famous mountains in this area, namely Visierskerf and Sikonyella's Hat. The base camp is located at the Langesnek Leadership Centre, from where hikers will commence the 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. 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 cedar 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. 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. At the sign board, the trail turns south in the direction of Sikonyella's Hat, traverses grassland and then descends towards a number of big willow trees, where hikers can have a nice rest or an early tea in the shade. From here the route runs further through the valley amongst a large stand of "ouhout" bushes. After crossing the stile at the game fence, the trail winds along a riverine valley, past a big sandstone overhang, and then contours into the first "waterkloof" (a deep ravine) with the unusual tufa waterfall. Once up the ladder at the waterfall, the route follows the riverbed. Be careful in this ravine for slippery rock, and use the safety cable. Stop for tea and a swim in the rock pools or at Shower Falls.

Once out of this ravine via the chain ladder, the path takes the hiker up to the top of this sandstone-carved ravine. The route then follows the contours below the cliffs. Energetic hikers can climb to the summit of Sikonyella's Hat (2 313 m), which should take at least one-and-a-half hours. The trail goes down into the second "waterkloof" (an ideal lunch stop) at the Oasepoort, which has a subtropical feeling, with large trees and a nice mountain stream. It then follows this ravine downstream, before turning right and ascending towards Bamboo Kloof. From here it is a short uphill walk to where it joins the vehicle track, which takes the hiker to the Barolong overnight camp, nestling under a magnificent sandstone overhang.

Hikers can sleep in the open under the overhang or in the traditional wattle-and-daub rooms. From here one can watch the sun goes down on a rewarding day amidst beautiful natural surroundings. Water is supplied in large containers. Please use it sparingly. If you need more water or want to wash yourself, follow the marked route down into the ravine below to the spring. It is about 450 meters from the overhang.

The second day's hike traverses the slopes of Visierskerf, with the high basalt cliffs towering above. Hikers will pass a rich variety of flora, past the Porcupine look-out point and then down into a ravine with high sandstone cliffs at "Bobbejaankrans". The route then ascends some way and contours around a ridge towards another ravine. Energetic hikers can climb to the summit of Visierskerf mountain (2 407 m), which will take at least two-and-a-half hours. Then it goes through the last of the "waterklowe" - the favourite being the secluded Witgatbad, or wallow in one of Seven Pools before the trail descends and meanders across the veld, where a variety of game can be seen. The route then turns in the direction of the Lodge and takes weary hikers past large willow trees and a water furrow to the large sandstone swimming pool, fed by fountains. For keen bird-watchers, there is a reed hide at the nearby dam. After a nice swim and a rest, you can walk the remaining 1,8 km back to the base camp at Langesnek.

Game that may be seen in the Reserve include big herds of zebra, black wildebeest, springbok, eland, gemsbok (sable antelope), hartebeest and blesbuck, while solitary duiker, mountain reedbuck, rhebuck and steenbok might also be seen. There are more than 230 bird species, and black eagles nest against the high cliffs of Visierskerf. Trees include ouhout, olienhout, ghwarrie, Cape holly, wild peach and sugar bush protea, with a wide variety of flowers and ferns.

The three-day trail splits from the two-day trail at the Witgatbad and 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 observe water birds.

The third day's walk 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. Or you can choose to take an easy hike out that follows the farm vehicle path with a marked turnoff to the Langesnek base camp.