

STARTING THE GIANTS CUP TRAIL – DAY 1:

NOTES: 1) Make sure you have hiking map No. 5: Cobham which is available from the Giants Cup Cafe shop at R50 (and map No. 6 : Garden Castle if you intend to do all 5 days of the trail.)

2) The Giants Cup Trail is the only marked path in the Drakensberg, it is marked with white footprints painted on the rocks. Every 1 kilometre, there is a kilometre number painted in black in the footprint.

From Sani lodge, there are three options:

OPTION 1: From the Official Start: The official start of the trail is 8km further up the Sani Pass road. Turn left from Sani Lodge and follow the road past Sani Pass Hotel (1km from Sani lodge), the Good Hope Store ruins (3.5km), Mkomazana Cottages (6km) and you will reach the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Field Rangers outpost and houses (7.5km) at the bottom of the zig-zags. You can park your car safely at the Field Rangers' outpost. Continue up the zig-zags and at the top, the Giants Cup Trail starts on the left, clearly signposted. Follow the white footprints to Cobham and the first hut, Pholela Hut. NOTE: Just after the 7km mark, there is a fork in the path. Look out for this, and make sure you take the right hand path, the left hand path will bring you back to Sani Lodge again. **FROM SANI LODGE TO COBHAM IS ABOUT 13KM.**

OPTION 2: Via the Gxalingenwa Valley: This option allows you to leave your car at Sani Lodge. In good weather, this is the most beautiful option with great pools to swim in along the valley! From Sani Lodge, turn left and walk up the Sani Pass road for about 2.5km until the road crosses the Gxalingenwa River over a big, new concrete bridge. (Just before the bridge is a fenced off roads camp.) Immediately after crossing the bridge, turn left and follow a track into a copse of eucalyptus (gum) trees. If you miss this turn off and continue along the road, you'll come to the ruins at Good Hope. Once in the trees, the track forks a few times, keep taking the left hand paths. After a few hundred metres, the path comes to the river. There are three crossings within a few hundred metres which normally can be done on stepping stones. NOTE: if the river is too full to cross, you can avoid the first three crossings by returning to the Sani pass road and going back across the concrete bridge. Turn right and go past the fenced roads camp. Climb up the slope to above the level of the cliffs above the river, then drop down into the Gxalingenwa valley just [past the third river crossing. The clear path then carries on up the left hand bank for a few kilometres. Along the way, the path will climb up through a narrow section of the valley, then it will level off with a long patch of indigenous forest on the opposite bank. A clamber up a rocky section brings the path into a narrow gorge with the river in a series of deep pools. Soon after this, the path climbs up and out of the valley and rejoins the river above the big waterfall. The next part of the river has marvelous swimming pools. The path crosses the river once more before joining the Giants Cup Trail at the beautiful iNgenwa Pool. You will see a path coming down from the right which the path you are on joins at the top end of the pool. Turn left and follow the white footprints across the Gxalingenwa River and on to Cobham and Pholela Hut. NOTE: Just after the 7km mark, there is a fork in the path. Look out for this, and make sure you take the right hand path, the left hand path will bring you back to Sani Lodge again. **TOTAL DISTANCE FROM SANI LODGE TO COBHAM IS ABOUT 15KM.**

OPTION 3: Via Stromness: This is the shortest route and especially good when the weather is bad. However, you miss out on the river and iNgenwa Pool. The path starts across the wooden footbridge around the corner from the office. Cross the stream and follow the path straight on through the trees. Follow the signs for "Stromness". The numbers you'll see on the way refer to our nature trail and there is an interpretive booklet available from the office. At the base of the mountain, a path branches off to the left, sign-posted "Nature Trail". Keep on straight and the path climbs steeply up to where the four fences meet. Go on through the gap between the fences, past the KZN Wildlife signs telling you that a permit is required (your overnight payment for the huts covers your entry permit) and keep following the path up the ridge to the top of Stromness. Once on top, you reach a pile of stones. Do not turn right, but rather continue straight along a clear path on the plateau. After about 5 minutes on the flat, the path starts to descend gently, heading in the direction of Ndlovini mountain. After another 10-15 minutes, the path reaches a 4 way path junction at the lowest point of the plateau. Keep going on straight, and the path climbs quite steeply up the lower slopes of Ndlovini. After about 20 minutes, the path reaches a junction with the Giants Cup Trail. This path is clearly marked with white footprints painted regularly on the rocks. Turn left here. If you miss the turning, you will see the 7km mark painted inside a footprint about 20m to the right of the junction. Turn round and go back as you are then going the wrong way!! **TOTAL DISTANCE FROM SANI LODGE TO COBHAM IS ABOUT 10KM.**