

# Friendship Trails

A section of the Bruce Trail in the Niagara Section is twinned with a section of the Rim of Africa Trail. This Friendship Trail opened in 2014.

## *A Hike on the Rim of Africa Friendship Trail*

By Trudy Senesi

When you read an overview of the Rim of Africa Trail it is not surprising to see similarities with The Bruce Trail. Words like “manage and promote a sustainable hiking route as a scenic and biodiversity corridor” and “conservation for the benefit of all” ring true here on the Niagara Escarpment as well.

The Rim of Africa, again like our Bruce Trail, is a route in progress, made up of various sections, some on open public land, others on private land with strict access conditions and agreements with private landowners. These can only be accessed with Rim of Africa trail leaders. And what a delightful, fun loving group these hike leaders are. They carry magic backpacks – when it’s time for lunch the food that is spread out before you makes one think of haute cuisine.

Travelling to see the Cederberg mountains was an unbelievable journey. Their beauty, rock art and refreshing rock-pools make the hike one to remember. Filling water bottles by rushing streams, diving into crystal clear lakes, climbing through mountain passes are all in a day’s hike. But so is the solitude and a time for introspection which is what our guides pointed out to us at the start of the hike – one hour, no talking – reflection only.

Upon our arrival we were taken to guest cottages – fully furnished – including wine glasses. After settling in we proceeded to the starting point of the Friendship Trail where a short ceremony took place acknowledging the twinning of the Bruce Trail and Rim of Africa Trail. With South African and Canadian flags flying both groups spoke of their love of hiking and concerns about conservation. Then the surprise of all surprises – children from the local school, dressed in vivid colours, treated us to a performance of dust dancing. Happy, joyful, foot

stomping – these are just a few words which describe this presentation.

As the evening sun set our hosts prepared a traditional South African BBQ called Braai which means “grilled meat”. Vegetarians need not have worried as there were also huge iron pots filled with layers upon layers of veggies (called a “potjie”) that were also roasted on the braai.

The next morning we were gently awakened by the sounds of a flute played by Galeo Saintz, one of the founders of the Rim of Africa.

After breakfast and just prior to starting our hike he brought out a book of thoughtful readings which he shared with us and then we set off – in silence. After the hour passed conversation filled the air as we compared notes, here-there, ours-yours. Stopping to take pictures of the unique proteas (a.k.a. sugar bushes) and the surrounding scenery was a must as we climbed and climbed to the Heuningvlei community where we would be spending the night. The mayor greeted us and, after giving us a brief background of the village, took us on a tour all the while explaining what their lives were like in the past and are now – many changes as one can imagine. Supper was made for us by the ladies of the local community and the words “home cooking”, in their most delicious sense, apply.

The final surprise came the next day as we were preparing to leave. Donkey carts! Yes, one returns sitting on a cart pulled by donkeys. Hang on here, folks, they wobble and if you happen to be sitting on the side facing the downward slope of the mountains you could get a little tense. This is not the swiftest mode of transport but it certainly added to our adventure. We arrived back at base camp safely, with many precious memories.

So, as the words printed in the Rim of Africa brochure say, “Happy hiking and may your mountain journey be of no ordinary experience.” •



Rim of Africa Friendship Trail scenery

Photo: Trudy Senesi