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## Upcoming Events

**14<sup>th</sup> Feb** – Blantyre Social

**17-18<sup>th</sup> March** – Mulanje Trip

**21-22<sup>nd</sup> April** - Club weekend camping trip to Fort Mangochi

Details on all these events to be shared later, keep an eye on the Facebook page and you emails!

## Club update

*Maggie O'Toole, Club Chair*

A belated Happiest of New Years from the MCM committee, here's to an exciting year filled with days on the Mountain!

We've been doing a bit of hut 'stuff' – restocking Chinzama Hut, which now has a full complement of equipment, and taking some extra pans etc. to stock up Madzeka Hut stores. At Sombani Hut the chimney has been partially blocked for some time, causing a lot of smoke in the

room and an ever-thickening layer of soot on all the walls and ceilings.

The guides and porters at Fort Lister have cleaned the chimney and the hut – the smoking has reduced but we will try and do more work on the chimney and attempt to stop the smoking completely. The chair covers are spotless. The hut is very useable! And a word on access to Fort Lister – on the direct route from Limbe, via Chiradzulu to Phalombe, the new tarred road is now complete; and the road from Phalombe has also been improved with some concrete stretches. This makes getting to Fort Lister very easy and fast so the Fort Lister guides and porters send a BIG welcome and hope to see more MCM members accessing the mountain via this route. It's a great way to get to Sombani and Chinzama in a day.

Thank you to all who came to our September club social where George Stewart gave us a tour of his recent hiking trip to a variety of lovely locations in South Africa and Carl Bruessow took us to Uganda and his climb in the Ruwenzori Mountains. We also held a successful Christmas social on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> December at Chez



Maky with Graham and Caroline biking and hiking us through Nepal, and Carl this time up the Atlas Mountains. Our next social is planned for 14<sup>th</sup> Feb - look out for details on the Facebook group and you will receive an invitation soon.

On 4<sup>th</sup> November MCM was delighted to take part in a celebration of Mount Mulanje at Jacaranda Cultural Centre. The event was arranged by Eva Mfutso Bengo and Robin Broadhead to launch their beautiful poetry and pastels book 'Ascent' (available for purchase at Jacaranda). In addition to being treated to Eva's poems and the chance to purchase one of Robin's pastels of the mountain, the polytechnic writers club presented some of their poetry, and this year's Porters Race winners were presented with gifts to acknowledge their great achievement. I was asked to speak about the origins of the mountain club (see an abridged version in this newsletter) and one of our members, Sophie Borgstein, presented a piece on her own relationship with Mulanje Mountain. It was a lovely afternoon.

Enjoy the newsletter and your hiking!  
Maggie▲

## New Guidebooks and Maps

We are delighted to let you know that the Hiking Guide to Mount Mulanje and the new map of Mount Mulanje are now available in hard copy through committee members/key keepers, at a discounted price for members, or through commercial outlets at a retail price for non-members.

The **Hiking Guide to Mount Mulanje**, by Drew Corybn, is also now available to [download from](#)

[Amazon](#) too. Hardcopies are just **K7500** to members, and **K9000** (rrp) to non-members.

The **Mulanje Hiking Maps** (as modelled by Maggie and Kate below) is available (full stocks available from early February) at just **K5000 to members, and K7500 to non-members.** ▲

## New Website

It's been a long time coming but the new website is finally live, visit <http://www.mcm.org.mw/> for loads of useful information about hiking in Malawi, and details of upcoming, and past trips.

A huge thank you to Rob, Polly and everyone who has contributed to this new, improved website. Note: We still have a few problems with graphics – we are working on it. ▲

## Celebrating Mount Mulanje at JCC

*Daisy Belfield*

Mount Mulanje is mysterious and multifaceted: from afar, from its slopes or from the peak, it offers each of us a deeply personal and unique experience. Whether for art, poetry, music, conservation, hiking, leisure or survival, our various understandings and interpretations of the mountain change; but it remains constant and ultimately unreachable. Few places on earth inspire such a spectrum of admiration.

So, it was that the celebrations in honour of the mountain at Jacaranda Cultural Center offered a diversity of speakers and performers expressing the summits, inclinations and hidden rifts of what Mulanje means to them.

The event was in launch of *The Ascent: Himmelsklufft*, a compilation of meditative poetry

by Eva Mfutso-Bengo, illustrated by Professor Robin Broadhead. The exhibition on display allowed visitors to make their own spiritual walk through familiar points of Mulanje, guided by Robin's gentle, articulate pastel work and Eva's mystic poetry. Robin offered fifty original works, painted over decades of visits to the mountain, assembled together for public display for the very first time. He sold almost every single one.

Maggie O'Toole spoke on behalf of the Mountain Club of Mulanje, illuminating the history of the club with amusing anecdotes and fascinating historical photographs. A subtle and lyrical reminder of the endurance of the hike was given by Sophie Barrowcliff-Borgstein, while Harry, an experienced Mulanje guide, outlined the practical challenges of climbing the mountain. Eva Mfutso-Bengo recited a selection of her poetry from the new publication, giving us personal insights into the process of her writing. Professor Joseph Mfutso-Bengo presented a scholarly account of *umunthu* and nature, invoking the Chewa creation myth as a reminder of the importance of preservation and interconnectivity. Finally, Kondwani Chamwala represented the Mulanje mountain seriously.

Music underscored the talks, with Janet Chitalo closing the event by reinforcing Kondwani's message in song: *Where have all the flowers gone?*. Our thanks too to the Polytechnic Writers' Club for their powerful and at times deeply moving poetical interpretations of the Mother Mountain.

Our guests of honour were the winners of Mulanje Porters' Race 2017. The Porters' Race requires an

ascent and descent which takes the average hiker nine hours; Dorris Fischer and James Musowa did it in just under two. James and Dorris live on the mountain itself, so know first-hand, on a day-to-day basis, what it means to survive the mountain. Jacaranda Cultural Center was honoured that they attended the event, and that all involved in the day were able to celebrate their feat. We wish them, and all who know what it means to live and breathe under the shadow of Mount Mulanje, every success in the peaks and troughs of life on the mountain. ▲

## Club trip reports

**Malosa Pools camping** – a really well attended, and very enjoyable trip to camp by the Malosa Pools. Photo below.

**Manga Peak day hike** – Maggie once again organized a day hike to the intimidating, but iconic Manga Peak. Gaining elevation quite quickly, the path allows for some beautiful views of the surrounding area, even despite the haze from smoke and dust. The final climb to the peak was quite steep; sheer granite slabs with tufts of grass to serve as foot and hand grips. A short trek



over the peak brings you to the stunning view point looking over the crater across to the Lichenya Plateau, well worth the 4+ hour hike. Thanks, Maggie, for another amazing hike! ▲

## Porter's Race: view from the back!

*Adrian Thomas*

I tend to consider myself pretty fit, and I love a good long trail run, so when some colleagues suggested I sign up with them to run the Porter's Race, I agreed without hesitation!

The doubt started to set in a few weeks later when I made my first visit to the mountain and took in the sheer scale of the climb involved. So began the training. Living and working in Zomba I'm lucky to have the Plateau to run up, but standing at Likubula early on race day, I knew I hadn't done enough. The start line was alive with nervous energy, as people laughed, joked and psyched themselves for the challenge ahead.

Go! The first few hundred metres were a mad dash for position, I knew I wanted to push myself early so I didn't get caught behind a slower group on the narrow sections of the steep Skyline path. Within a few minutes I realised I was pushing too hard, and would just have to accept my position.

Skyline is an unforgiving upwards slog of a path, the altitude tracker on my running watch tells me that the first 5km of the race saw a 947m climb, my legs would swear it was much more!

A constant stream of local runners, interspersed with the occasional expat, overtook me as I staggered, more than ran my way up. I don't believe anything could have prepared me for the psychological blow of being overtaken by a barefoot Malawian lady, running up the path in what I am sure was once a very beautiful cocktail dress. I looked down at my trail running shoes, satellite running watch and felt every inch the fool.

Forcing myself on, more out of shame than any real strength in the legs, we topped out and I was able to take in the views of the Chambe basin, and appreciate the relative flat of the trail here, passing an encouraging group of hikers, and a much-needed water stop at Chambe Hut.

Porter's Race route is never truly flat, just varying degrees of up and down, but somehow, I found my stride across the plateau, managing to overtake a good number of runners, including some who looked much worse, even, than I felt!



Down the Milk Run to finish, I thought, would be where I could make up some time, having always enjoyed a free run down the Fells of England's Lake District. How wrong I was! The path down is technical with lots of loose rock, and very hard on the knees. I stayed close with a friendly Frenchman, who summed it up when, as we talked our way down, I paused for breath trying to find the words to describe how I felt, he filled in for me: *"unpleasant!"*

The down seemed to take an age, and I caught myself swearing under my breath when at one view point, far from being close to the bottom, we were less than halfway down! Still, I pressed on, was met at the river by a crowd of well-wishers (and much faster finishers) who encouraged me over the last few hundred meters – I even managed something resembling a sprint finish, coming in at a not totally unreasonable 3 hours and 55 minutes.

The race organisers had laid on some excellent and much needed food, and a doctor at the finish forced down some painkillers to ease the recovery!

The race was eye opening and spectacular, with a really friendly and welcoming atmosphere, but my overriding emotions at the end were relief, exhaustion and more than a hint of humility. The local porters are exceptional athletes – the winner finishing in a little over 2 hours. Not for the fainthearted, perhaps I'll stick to hiking on the mountain from now on! ▲

## On the origins of the Club

*This is an extract from Maggie's talk to the Jacaranda Cultural Centre in November.*

Of course, Mulanje Mountain had been traversed by many, long before the club's existence.

Whilst Stone Age and quartz artefacts have been found on Mulanje Mountain it is unlikely that the mountain has ever been permanently settled. It is however very possible that the Akafula took refuge there after fleeing from the lake shore. Local legends of little people abound and Michese in particular is regarded as being haunted by their spirits.

Fast forward to the 1920s and Ma Brown had her cottage and cows on the Lichenya Plateau – another refuge – this time from the heat of the plains. In the late 1940s the British government commissioned the author Laurens van der Post to visit Mount Mulanje to report on this 'wild plateau' and to explore the potential for utilising the mountain resources. This visit resulted in his book 'Venture to the Interior'.

The mountain clubs' founder was Pat Hall who had spent 10 years hiking over Mulanje between the world wars and placed many of the original stone cairns on most peaks. In December 1952 he persuaded 20 Mulanje devotees to found the Mlanje Mountain Club and he became the first chair.

Another famous founding member was Moira Bird who had a club hut on Lichenya plateau named after her and who I had the great privilege of meeting in New Zealand a couple of years before her death. Early club members were John and Anne Killick who arrived in Malawi in 1952 and still reside today in Newlands. They were avid

hikers and spent enormous amounts of time exploring new routes. In the 70s the club changed its name to the Mulanje Mountain Club and again in the 80s to the Mountain Club of Malawi.

So the Mountain Club of Malawi is 65 years old! During that time Malawi has lived through the Federation, disbanded the federation, and seen independence and 5 presidents – long and momentous times. Have there been such dramatic changes in the club during this time?

What would the founders of the club think about our current Mountain Club of Malawi?! Undoubtedly those founders would see many and dramatic changes in the mountain itself. As for the club perhaps things would look very familiar! – groups of enthusiastic, chattering hikers setting off early in the morning to climb the steep slopes of the mountain. The chattering would, as in their days, quieten as the going gets tougher, to resume later in the day during a cold plunge in one of Mulanje's many beautiful pools and around the fire in the forestry department huts as tea and supper are prepared.

If the founders peered in the club stores they would find them comfortably familiar – enamel plates, mugs and kettles, blankets and enormous pans! We have not dared to throw out some of those founders more curious kitchen items such



as multiple egg whisks! The founders would undoubtedly see groups playing scrabble and other games – just like they did!

They would see some changes - a more diverse membership as Malawians begin to enjoy hiking, although the club members remain predominantly expatriates – and many, many more visitors from all over the world enjoying the joys and challenges of the mountain and appreciating the shelter of the huts. We probably dress in unfamiliar clothing of bright colours and kid ourselves that we are water proofed ... nothing is waterproofed when Mulanje rain falls! We have a small community fund to support projects around the mountain. I am the 21st chairperson of the mountain club – and the first woman! – I wonder whether that would surprise some of those early founders! ▲