

# Botanical tour to the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho

(dates around 7-27 January 2017)

Tour organized and lead by: **Harry Jans**  
Botanical guide: **Jenny Wainwright-Klein**



For January 2017 I am planning to organize and lead a very special botanical tour to Lesotho. There are many tours to South Africa, which visit Lesotho just for a few days, but during this trip we will mainly visit Lesotho and will explore it well. Only in the first days we will stay in Witsieshoek to botanize in this plant rich area.

During this trip we will visit places which not have been visited by botanical groups before. One of these places is the Sehlabathebe National Park in the South with spectacular rock formations and a wealth of different and endemic plants.

The main goal during this trip will be to see as many (alpine)plants as possible, but there are also opportunities to see some Lesotho culture and of course the Katse Botanical Garden.

The meeting place for the trip will be Johannesburg Airport, where we will be picked up by our ground agent. From there we will drive to Witsieshoek. During the whole tour there will be no long, difficult or steep treks, making it suitable for most people.

Accommodation will be in various hotel/lodges, which have at a few places no en-suite facilities.

Transport will be always in 4x4 jeeps. The jeeps are 6 seater, but will take no more then 4 people in one jeep to give some extra space. Jeeps are the only possible way of transport here and unfortunately the cost of this tour is higher then when using a bus.

Everyone will have to arrange her/his own flight arrangements. Because I want to avoid to stay in a hotel in Johannesburg (safety issues) you need to arrive by plane at the Airport in the morning (before 12:00 am) so we are able to drive in the afternoon to our accommodation in Witsieshoek.

On day 18 we will drive down the Sani Pass and stay the night at Howick (or Harrismith) and stay the night there to depart the next day to Johannesburg for our flight back home.

**Important!** This is a privately organized botanical tour with not much overhead. I am not an official tour agency but will bring a lot of expertise to organize and lead botanical tours to remote places and I am to happy to guide you through this wonderful country and show you its beautiful scenery and local (alpine)flora.

I am not a member of any guarantee fund and you have to arrange your own travel- and cancellation insurances. All tour members have to sign a Travel Agreement to make things clear if something unforeseen will occur. In this Travel Agreement are also the cancellation charges written down.

Find below the provisional itinerary, which can still change because of weather/road conditions or other circumstances we cannot foresee.

## Provisional itinerary Botanical tour to the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho

### Day 1 Johannesburg – Witsieshoek

We arrive at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg in the morning and set off for the Witsieshoek Mountain Resort, an approximate 4,5 hour drive. At an altitude of 2220 m the resort has a marvelous view of the Drakensberg's Mont-Aux-Source and Amphitheater, an enormous curved basalt cliff face over 5 km long and up to 1200 m in height forming the top of the escarpment at just over 3000 m at this point in the Royal Natal National Park. A short walk in the surrounding grounds of the lodge to look at *Brunsvigia natalensis*, *Clematis brachiata*, and other plants. For those interested in birds the bearded vulture is often spotted from Resort and up to 300 birds are found in the Drakensberg.

Overnight at Witsieshoek Mountain Resort. (3 nights)

<http://www.witsieshoek.co.za>

Meals: L, D

### Day 2 Witsieshoek

After breakfast we take a short drive to the Sentinel parking lot (ca. 2500 m). From here we will follow the hiking path to botanise in the alpine meadows, around the Sentinel (3165 m) and will head to the chain ladders which lead to the top of the escarpment. This is a fairly gentle hike as the path soon evens out and follows the contour around the Sentinel and to the escarpment. Large cushions of *Euphorbia clavarioides* grow on the rocks here near the parking lot. *Eucomis bicolor* and *Eucomis autumnalis* flower in seepage areas, and *Diascia anastrepta*, *Dierama dracomontana*, *Moraea inclinata* and many others flower on the grassy slopes. At the base of the basalt cliffs large stands of *Agapanthus campanulatus* and *Nerine bowdenii* can be found as well as the large yellow-flowered *Moraea alticola*. The chain ladder leads up to the top of the escarpment and is no problem for those with a good head for heights. The rest of us will look for the pygmy-sized *Eucomis schijffii* which grows nearby and enjoy the view while eating our packed lunch. On the drive back to the hotel we will stop to look at large colony of *Xerophyta villosa* growing just above the road cutting.

Overnight at Witsieshoek Mountain Resort.

Meals: B, L, D

### Day 3 Witsieshoek – Monantsa's Pass

Today's drive takes us to Monantsa's Pass (3167 m). Driving through Phuthaditjhaba (1646 m) and then east towards the Lesotho border we will stop to botanise along the way as the road dips down into the sandstone again before returning to the basalt areas at the Pass. The Giant Squill (*Merwillia natalensis* = *Scilla natalensis*) grows in abundance on the lip of sandstone overhangs. We will see plants from a wide range of altitude: from 1646 m to 3167 m.

Overnight Witsieshoek Mountain Resort



Meals: B, L, D

#### Day 4 Witsieshoek - Oxbow

We depart from the Witsieshoek Mountain Resort after breakfast and drive through the Golden Gate Highlands National Park to the Lesotho border post at Caledonspoort. In the grasslands of the Golden Gate Park we will see *Gladiolus*, *Eulophia*, *Satyrium*, and *Agapanthus* among others. Various antelope and wildebeest also populate the grasslands. After crossing into Lesotho we drive through the town of Butha Buthe and on to the Liphofung Caves and Cultural Centre with San Rock Art on the cave walls and a visitors centre incorporating a display of Basotho culture. After the caves we carry on southwards, over Moteng Pass (2820 m) to Oxbow botanising along the way.

Overnight at Oxbow Lodge (3 nights)

<http://www.oxbow.co.za>

Meals: B, L, D

#### Day 5 Oxbow – Moteng Pass

After breakfast we drive north to the nearby Moteng Pass (2820 m). We will explore the southern slopes first which are carpeted with *Helichrysum adenocarpum* with their attractive pink buds and white flowers. Various *Erica*, *Senecio* and other afro-montane plants. On the north side of the Pass, below a stunning waterfall, grow *Kniphofia thodei*, *Gunnera perpensa* and *Kniphofia northiae* and other alpines. We can enjoy our packed lunches sitting at the top of the Pass with magnificent views over the valleys and mountains. After lunch we proceed back to Oxbow lodge and botanize up the slopes behind the lodge.



Overnight at Oxbow Lodge.

Meals: B, L, D

#### Day 6 Oxbow – Mahlasela Pass – Tlaeeng Pass

Today we head further south towards Tlaeeng Pass (3275 m) stopping to botanize along the way. The sponges and bogs should be in flower at this time of year with miniature *Lobelia galpinii* and *Rhodohypoxis deflexa* forming a dense carpet dotted with *Athrixia*, *Senecio*, *Felicia* and other perennials in a colourful mosaic. *Lotononis*, *Zaluzianskya*, *Delosperma*, *Ruschia*, the recently described *Massonia saniensis* and other alpines grow on the stony, drier areas. On the way back to Oxbow we will stop to botanise on the Mahlasela Pass (3220m) and on the slopes leading down to the Afri Ski Lodge. We can expect to find *Felicia drakensbergensis* in full flower with the last of the *Moraea alpina* still in flower here as well as *Albuca*, *Berkheya*, *Jamesbrittenia* and many other alpines.



Overnight at Oxbow Lodge.

Meals: B, L, D

### Day 7 Oxbow – Letseng-la-Terae – Motebong Village

Departing from Oxbow Lodge after breakfast we once more head south over the Tlaeeng Pass and meet up with Bongani Ntloko, a Lesotho naturalist with a passion for flowers. He will join us for an hours botanising on a small hill on the edge of the Diamond mine. This area has not been grazed for over 40 years and we will see many plants which used to be common in this area, such as the *Holothrix*, *Androcymbium*, *Diascia*, *Alepidea*, *Dierama* and more. Bongani will also take us to visit a colony of *Aloe polyphylla*, the famous Spiral Aloe, a short drive and walk away.



Leaving Letseng we drive west on a dirt road over the Pass of the Guns (3240m) past Kao Mine stopping to botanise when we see interesting plants. The Pass of the Guns road, is approximately 70 kilometers long, but very rough and the driving will be slow. At Ha Lejone, on the northern banks of the Katse Dam, we turn off for the Motebong Village (2100 m) where we will spend the next 2 nights. Motebong Village was originally built to house the engineers working on the Katse Dam and outlet tunnel. There we can enjoy superb fresh trout from the dam.

Overnight at Motebong Lodge. (2 nights)

<http://motebong.com/facilities/>

Meals: B, L, D



### Day 8 Motebong Village – Mafika Lisiu Pass – Bokong Nature Reserve

Today we drive to the Mafika Lisiu Pass (3090m), approximately 30 minutes away, and spend the morning botanising on the pass and the slopes. We can expect to see many *Craterocapsa*, *Disa*, *Alepidea*, *Euryops*, *Helichrysum*, *Rhodohypoxis* and other alpines. Large colonies of *Moraea alticola* and *Galtonia viridiflora* are found on the northern slopes of the pass. Mafika Lisiu Pass lies in the Bokong Nature Reserve and after our packed lunch we will visit the visitor's centre, and botanise along the different footpaths in the Nature Reserve. With a little luck, we will have enough time to visit the Letsele s Pass (3198m) for more high altitude botanising.

Overnight at Motebong Lodge.

Meals: B, L, D

### Day 9 Motebong Lodge - Katse

After breakfast we leave the Motebong Lodge and drive to Katse stopping to botanise along the way. After a fairly early arrival at the Katse Dam Lodge, +-10am, we will walk through the small village to the Katse Botanical Garden 5 minutes from the lodge. Originally planned as a rescue station for plants before the dam was flooded, in particular indigenous medicinal plants, the Katse Botanical Garden grew into a garden displaying the



mountain flora of all of Lesotho with emphasis on medicinal plants. There is a small propagation area where indigenous plants are grown for planting community gardens and for sale to visitors. The garden curator will give us a brief introduction to the Botanical Garden after which we can walk through together looking at the collection. In flower in January: *Gladiolus*, *Hesperantha*, *Berkheya*, *Phygelius*, *Dierama*, *Plectranthus* and many more. The afternoon will be spent in the Katse Botanical Garden, or touring the Dam or at the lodge enjoying the view over the dam and watching the southern bald ibises coming in to roost on the opposite banks as dusk falls.



Overnight at Katse Dam Lodge. (1 night)

<http://www.katselodge.co.za>

Meals: B, L, D

### **Day 10 Katse – Sehlabathebe National Park**

An early start is necessary today as we have a long drive to the Sehlabathebe National Park. Travelling in 4x4 vehicles to the Matebeng Valley via Thaba Tseka and Sehonghong where we will cross the Senqu River (the mighty Orange River of South Africa) and drive along the Matebeng River (2400 m) which has amazing Basalt and Sandstone rock formations. Stopping to botanise along the way, we drive up the Matebeng Pass (2940 m) and down into Sehlabathebe.



Overnight at Sehlabathebe National Park. (3 nights)

<http://www.safarinow.com/go/sehlabathebenationalparkheritagelodge/>

Meals: B, L, D

### **Day 11 Sehlabathebe National Park**

The Sehlabathebe National Park, Lesotho's first national park, and second largest, is remote, rugged and beautiful, and getting there is always a worthwhile adventure. Sehlabathebe means the "Shield of the Plateau", mirroring the rolling grasslands, wild flowers and silence provide a sense of complete isolation. Situated in the south-east corner of Lesotho, at an average elevation of some 2400 m above sea level access could be challenging as it is rather remote. The park provides the best secluded environment nature could offer with soaring mountain vistas, secluded rock pools, waterfalls, rock dwellings, massive overhangs, rock art, rock arches and a beautiful and unique ecosystem of plants, birds and animals. It offers a significant habitat to a range of unique Afro-Alpine and Sub-Alpine plants, mammals, avifauna, reptiles, amphibians and fish. It has spectacular scenery with unique rock formations. Most of the Park is taken up by a designated wilderness area and although small



by international standards, it retains its natural character and is uninhabited. The Park is home to various outstanding biodiversity species, some of which are endemic and endangered.

We will start our botanising at the tarns in the north of the Park.

The endemic *Aponogeton ranunculiflorus* grows in the water of the tarns and marshy areas nearby are populated with *Cyrtanthus*, *Chironia*, *Drosera* amongst others. A wealth of ground orchids can be found in the grasslands, for example *Disperis*, *Habenaria* and *Schizochilus* to name a few. The only alpine *Protea* grows here, *Protea dracomontana* and might still be in flower. After our lunch we will move on to a different area in the National Park to botanise.



Overnight at Sehlabathebe National Park

Meals: B, L, D

### **Day 12 Sehlabathebe – Ramitseliso’s Gate**

Today we’ll drive out of the Park eastwards towards Ramitseliso’s Gate where there are good spots to see *Brunsvigia grandiflora*, *Hypoxis*, *Bulbine* and *Rhodohypoxis* amongst others. We’ll spend the afternoon botanising in the National Park.

Overnight at Sehlabathebe National Park.

Meals: B, L, D

### **Day 13 Sehlabathebe – St. James Mission**

We leave the Sehlabathebe National Park after breakfast and drive over the Matebeng Pass (2940m) back to Sehonghong botanising along the way. Near Sehonghong we can look at San Rock Art in sandstone caves. We travel through the Linakaneng valley and up the Menoaneng Pass (3050m) this will give us an insight of which areas we can botanise in the next day.

Overnight at St James Mission and/or Molumong Lodge, both backpackers lodges. (2 nights)

<http://www.stjameslodge.co.za/index.php/page/gallery>

<https://molumong.wordpress.com>

Meals: B, L, D



### **Day 14 St. James Mission – Menoaneng Pass**

We drive to the Menoaneng Pass (3050m) to botanise. Here we can expect to see *Albuca*, *Androcymbium*, *Bulbine*, *Cotyledon*, *Erica*, *Romulea* and more alpines. We could even visit the Linakaneng valley that we traversed the day before if we spotted anything of interest on the way through.

Overnight at St James Mission.

Meals: B, L, D

### **Day 15 St. James Mission – Sani Stone Lodge**

After breakfast we leave St James Mission and travel via a 4x4 track, through planted crop areas for +7 kilometers, back onto the road heading for the Sani Pass. On the way up Kotisepholo Pass (Black Mountain Pass) we will see *Senecio*, *Cotyledon*, *Dierama*, etc. On the top of the Pass

(3240 m) we will stop for lunch and will see *Helichrysum pagophilum*, *H. milfordiae* and other high altitude plants. We will make a number of stops to botanise on the way to the Sani Stone Lodge.

Overnight Sani Stone Lodge (3 nights)

<http://www.sanistonelodge.co.za/index.html>

Meals: B, L, D.



### **Day 16 Sani Stone Lodge – Hodgson’s Peak**

We leave after breakfast for Hodgson’s Peak (3257 m), it’s about a 15 minute drive from the lodge. A packed lunch provided by Sani Stone Lodge will allow us to spend all day botanising along the escarpment and in the Hodgson’s Peak area. Some of the plants we will see are: *Disperis*, *Erica*, *Eucomis*, *Glumicalyx*, *Sebaea*, *Wahlenbergia*, *Zaluzianskya* and others.

Overnight Sani Stone Lodge

Meals: B, L, D

### **Day 17 Sani Stone Lodge – Kotisepholo Pass – Thabana Ntlenyana**

Depart after breakfast for Kotisepholo Pass (3240 m), where we will spend some time botanising and after our packed lunch it is only a short walk, botanising along the way, to Thabana Ntlenyana (3482 m), the highest point in Africa south of Kilimanjaro.

Overnight Sani Stone Lodge

Meals: B, L, D



### **Day 18 Sani Stone Lodge – Howick (or Harrismith)**

We leave for the Lesotho border and the Sani Pass (2874 m) after breakfast. There will be a number of stops to botanise and to enjoy the view as we descend Sani Pass. Some of the plants to expect along the Pass road are: *Aristea*, *Cussonia*, *Cycnium*, *Protea*, *Diascia*, *Dierama*, *Euryops*, *Watsonias* and more lowland flowers. Packed lunch will be provided by Sani Stone Lodge.

Overnight Howick (or Harrismith)

Meals: B, L, D

### **Day 19 Howick – Johannesburg**

Depart from Howick (or Harrismith) for O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. This is about 5 hours’ drive with some stops along the way especially to see *Eulophia*.

Flight back home.

Meals: B, L

END OF TOUR.

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**INCLUDING**

All accommodation in shared twin rooms  
All meals + packet lunches mentioned in the program  
All transport in 4x4 vehicles  
Local travel guide  
Botanical guide  
2x-bottled water per person/day  
All entry fees  
Toilet paper  
Basic first aid kits

**EXCLUDING**

Flight tickets  
Cancellation insurance  
Personal travel insurance  
Drinks  
Emergency evacuation  
Visa if necessary (most of the countries do not need to apply for a visa)  
Tips

**Costs**

Tour price in the region of Euro 3850,- p/p on the basis of a shared twin room.  
Additional cost for single room, where possible €450,-  
*(note: extreme fluctuation in exchange rate between US\$ and Euro can change the final price when payment is due)*

I hope after reading the above information about this special botanic tour to the Kingdom in the Sky you decide to join me on this adventure.

If you have particular questions or if would like to signed in for this tour, please get in touch with me. Either by phone: 0031-(0)55-5052260 or by e-mail: jansalpines(at)online.nl

With kind regards,  
Harry Jans