

Route Description: Eastern Loop of the Old Salt Trail

The Eastern Loop is approximately 45 km of trail on both wilderness trails and jeep tracks. This trail is used in the Soutpansberg Mountain Marathon and offers spectacular scenery and mountain bushveld experiences. It is designed to accommodate the seasoned hiker that enjoys being completely self-sufficient. It is a circular trail that starts and finishes at Medike West Nature Reserve at the bottom of the Sand River Gorge in the heart of the Western Soutpansberg Nature Reserve. The loop traverses adjacent properties in an easterly direction towards Happy Rest Nature Reserve and back. It climbs up the mountain on the eastern side of the gorge, takes in spectacular mountain views and enables the hiker to truly connect with nature.

The loop can be completed in either three to five days, depending on the time a hiker has available and their fitness level. It is back to basics on this loop, with the first night's accommodation at a wilderness campsite and an option of nights two and three at either Ingwe House or Crewe Camp Site. All hikes are led by an EWT Soutpansberg Ranger.

Option 1: three-day, two-night hike (33–35 km)

Day 1: Medike West – Medike East Castle Rock Camp Site (approx. 7 km)

Day 2: Medike East Castle Rock Camp Site to Ingwe House/ Crewe Campsite (approx. 10 to 11 km)

Day 3: Ingwe House/Crewe Camp Site via long traverse back to Medike West (approx. 15 km)

Option 2: four-day, three-night hike (42–48 km)

Day 1: Medike West – Medike East Castle Rock Camp Site

Day 2: Medike East Castle Rock Camp Site to Ingwe House/ Crewe Campsite (night 2)

Day 3: Ingwe House/ Crewe Campsite via Crewe Escarpment Trail (7km) and Bushman paintings option (4km) back to same accommodation (hikers can leave their kit behind and take a day pack for the day)

Day 4: Ingwe House/Crewe Camp Site via long traverse back to Medike West

For a five-day option, the long traverse from Ingwe/Crewe back to Medike West can be split in two, with hikers spending an extra night camping on Medike East.



NOTE: Medike West requires a high clearance vehicle. Hikers with sedan cars can arrange transfers to the start from secure parking nearby.

The Route: Medike West to Castle Rock Camp Site on Medike East

Distance: approx. 7–8 km

Difficulty: moderate to difficult – official Green Flag Ratings coming soon!

Route Description:

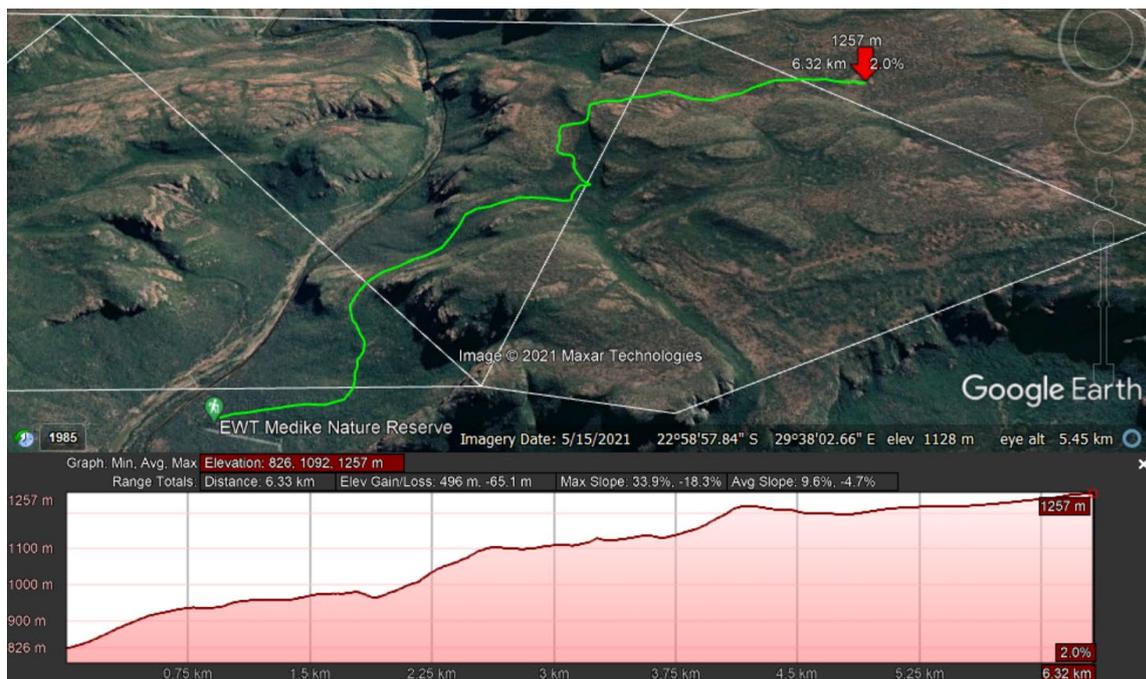
Hikers can park high-clearance vehicles at the start at Medike West, where the group will be welcomed by the Endangered Wildlife Trust team and introduced to the EWT Soutpansberg Ranger that will be accompanying them on the trail. After a short briefing, hikers will depart Medike West to start their adventure on the Soutpansberg.

The route up to Medike East is an old, well-established trail that has been used to traverse the gorge for many years. It is a long, sometimes steep climb up to the top of the gorge, winding through rugged mountain forests and rocky hill slopes. There are ample opportunities for hikers to take a break along the way and take in the spectacular viewpoints overlooking the gorge. The route also passes a fountain along the way. Once on top of the mountain, the trail joins a jeep track through beautiful sand veld forests to end up at the Castle Rock Camp Site on Medike East.

Accommodation:

Castle Rock Camp Site is a basic campsite with only a tap for running water and a water trough for the game. A table and an old braai are available, and wood can be provided outside of the fire season at an additional cost (R50/pile). **Fires are prohibited during fire season (1 August to first rains in Nov/Dec) and windy conditions.**

Optional extra: Hire a tent and sleeping mat from the EWT (small two-person hiking tent) that will be delivered to the campsite by a Ranger for you to set up (R100 per tent & mat, limited availability).



NOTE: Medike West requires a high clearance vehicle. Hikers with sedan cars can arrange transfers to the start from secure parking nearby.

The Route: Castle Rock Camp Site on Medike East to Ingwe House or Crewe Camp Site

Distance: approx. 10–11 km

Difficulty: moderate to difficult – official Green Flag Ratings coming soon!

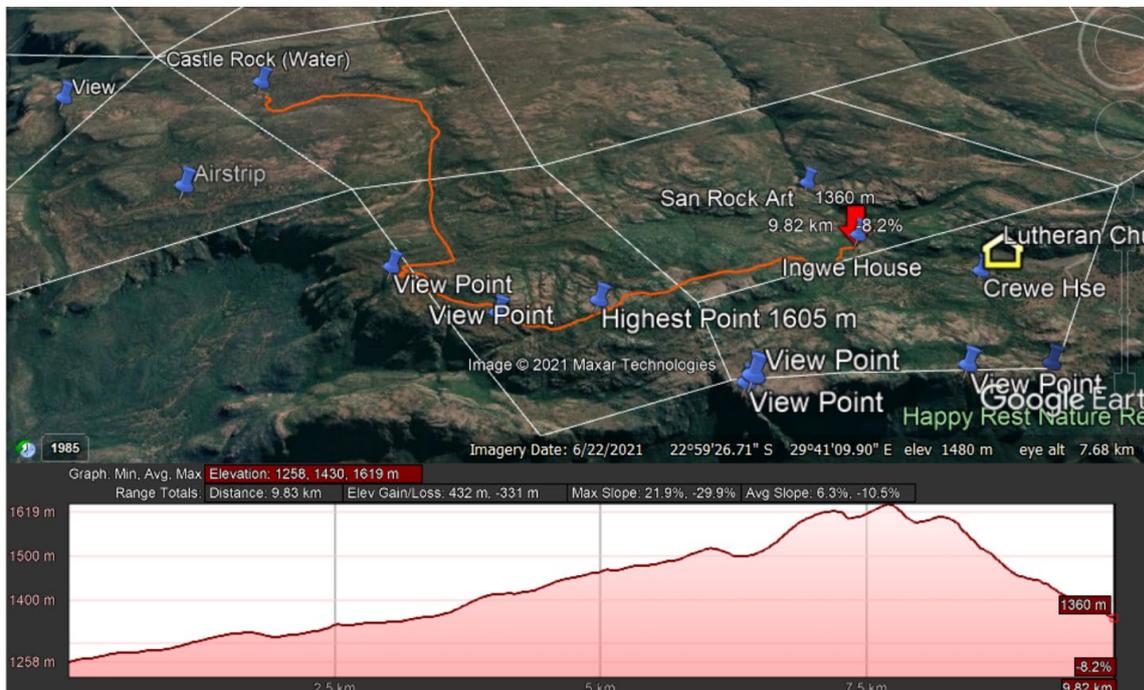
Route Description:

The route starts on jeep tracks in Medike East, which forms the main access road to the neighbouring Ingwe property, with a couple of small stream crossings along the way. This route takes the hiker through pristine Soutpansberg Mountain Bushveld, heading south towards Ingwe. The route then heads west out to the escarpment to a viewpoint with incredible views across the entire far western Soutpansberg. Shortly after this, the trail becomes a single track, winding its way through a variety of habitats as it climbs up a mountain to reach the highest point of 1605 m. After this, it is a fairly steep descent, again through various habitats, from rocky slopes, small scrambles, and grassy and forested areas down to the accommodation in the valley below. Spectacular views of valleys and mountains make this a stunning section of the hike.

Accommodation Options:

Ingwe Farm House: This is an old farmhouse with additional chalets that can accommodate eight people. It comes fully serviced with linen and towels, hot water and braai/fire facilities, as well as a pool.

Crewe Camp Site: This adds an additional 1 km to the hike for self-sufficient hikers preferring to camp. The campsite is nestled against the mountain with spectacular views across the valley and has a shower and toilet available.



NOTE: Medike West requires a high clearance vehicle. Hikers with sedan cars can arrange transfers to the start from secure parking nearby.

The Optional Extra Route: Crewe Loop and Bushman Paintings

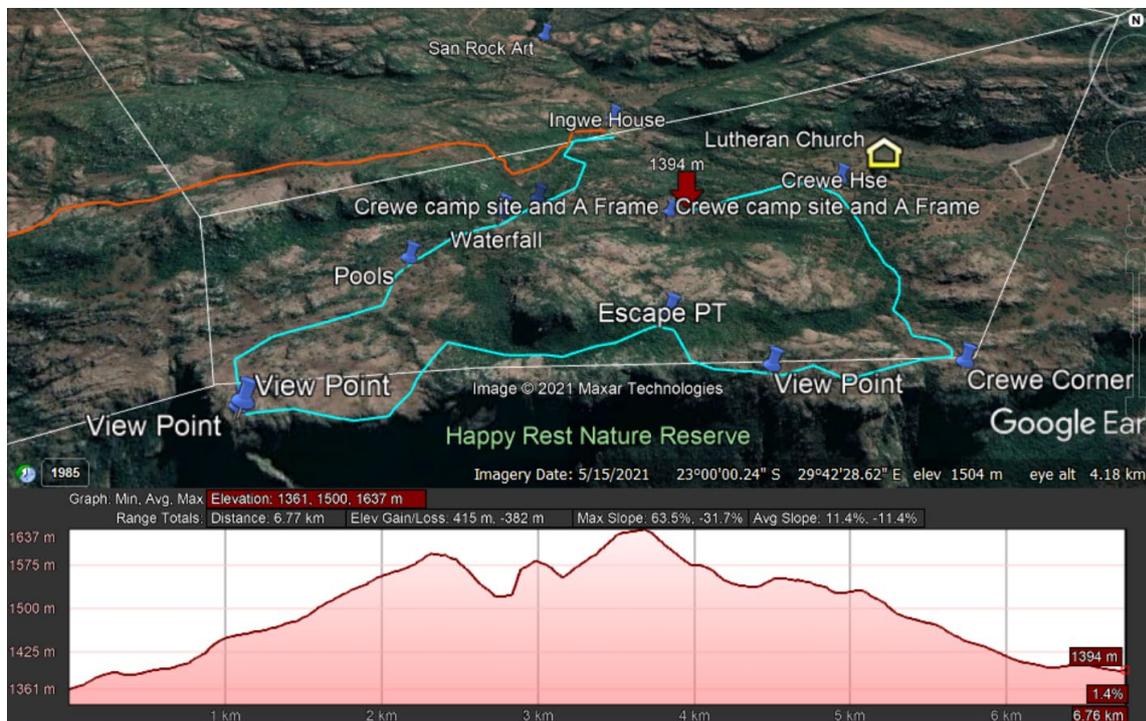
Distance: Crewe Loop – approx. 7 km, Bushman Paintings – approx. 3–4 km

Difficulty: moderate – official Green Flag Ratings coming soon!

Route Description:

Hikers can opt for enjoying an extra day on the mountain without the hassle of carrying a big pack and spending two nights at their chosen accommodation option. From Ingwe House or Crewe Camp Site, the route will take you along jeep tracks past an old Lutheran Church, which can be visited. It then passes the old Crewe Farm House (soon to become an accommodation option) and heads up along an old jeep track towards the southern escarpment of the Soutpansberg, climbing up over rocky ledges. The trail continues uphill along the escarpment, then heads in and out of a beautiful fairy forested area in a saddle next to Baken-Kop (the second highest peak of the Soutpansberg). Once out of the forest, the trail climbs up a rocky slope to reach the ridge, overlooking the southern plains and communities below. The trail continues along the ridge, which offers beautiful views over the and eventually descends through the beautiful valley to hike along a mountain stream with a small, rocky waterfall and pools along the way (when the river is flowing). The trail then rejoins a jeep track that will take hikers back to their accommodation, depending on where they stay. This route is easily accomplished during a morning's hike.

For the extra treat of a rest back at camp, hikers can head over to the San Rock Art site on Ingwe in the afternoon, which is a short walk (<5 km) from the accommodation options.



NOTE: Medike West requires a high clearance vehicle. Hikers with sedan cars can arrange transfers to the start from secure parking nearby.

The Route: Final Day, Ingwe House/Crewe Camp Site via long traverse back to Medike West

Distance: Approx. 15–16 km

Difficulty: moderate to difficult – official Green Flag Ratings coming soon!

Route Description:

The final day is a long traverse all the way back to Medike West. It follows the jeep track access road from Ingwe House into Medike East. The road has some ups and downs and is fairly rocky in places and passes by where alien tree clearing work and habitat restoration work is currently in progress, undertaken by the EWT Soutpansberg Rangers. It passes through a beautiful valley with rocky cliffs on the side and beautiful mountain habitats. Once through the gate into Medike East, a little way along, the trail then departs from the jeep track and heads up a rocky slope towards the west. It winds its way through the bush and over some rocks until it reaches the old airstrip and levels off. From here, it starts heading back down the mountain towards Medike West, with a steep rocky descent down to the fountain, where it rejoins the original old trail off the mountain, again with spectacular mountain and Sand River Gorge views along the way.

This is a long day’s hike with some technical areas once off the jeep track, which will make it challenging for hikers who have already been out for a couple of days. There is an option (by special arrangement) to split this final route in two and spend an extra night camping at Medike East.



ESSENTIAL HIKER’S INFORMATION

Hiking in the mountain is an extremely rewarding experience, with an incredible sense of place, beautiful scenery, challenging and technical trails, and lots of wildlife to be seen along the way. However, hikers need to be prepared and very fit to undertake these trails.

Hikers use the trails completely at their own risk and are responsible for their own safety on the trail. An EWT Ranger will accompany hikers on the trail, some of whom are training to become field guides. They are all trained in basic first aid.

NOTE: Medike West requires a high clearance vehicle. Hikers with sedan cars can arrange transfers to the start from secure parking nearby.



Risks:

The trails traverse some difficult and rocky terrain, sometimes with loose stones and rocks underfoot or potentially slippery rocks. Hikers need to be careful on the trail and watch where they walk.

The mountain is a haven for wildlife, some of it dangerous. Hikers need to keep a close eye out, especially for snakes, as help can be far away in difficult to reach areas of the mountain.

The weather can be variable, especially in summer, with the likelihood of thundershowers and lightning. If the weather conditions make the trails too dangerous, hikers may need to opt out for these days.

Communications:

There is very little signal on the mountain. However, signal can be found along the ridges at intermittent places, especially on the south-facing cliff edges. The EWT Ranger accompanying the hikers will also have a 2-way radio for communications back to Medike. However, this also does not have full coverage on all the routes.

Emergency Access:

There are sections of the trail where there is no vehicle access at all, but there are jeep tracks that do get to all accommodation sites. However, this track network is at least two hours away from the nearest clinic or hospital (in case of emergencies). Hikers use the trails at their own risk and should ensure that they have sufficient medical aid should an emergency evacuation be required.

What to bring:

Backpackers need to come fully equipped and self-sufficient for the trail.

Some suggested items:

- Backpack
- Hat
- Sunblock
- Appropriate hiking boots or trail shoes
- First aid kit
- Enough food for the full trail
- Water bottle
- Hiking stove and cookware
- Tent (option to rent-a-tent at Medike East campsite)
- Sleeping mat
- Sleeping bag
- Appropriate hiking clothing for all weather conditions (e.g. waterproof jacket)
- Emergency blanket

NOTE: Medike West requires a high clearance vehicle. Hikers with sedan cars can arrange transfers to the start from secure parking nearby.