

Slackpacker's Delux: Western Loop of the Old Salt Trail

This trail is a spectacular four-night, five-day, 66 km slackpacking hike across the spectacular western Soutpansberg Mountains. Unique in its splendour and beauty, the range stretches in a mighty panorama across the northern reaches of the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Winding through this remarkable landscape, you will discover yellowwood forests, proteas, ancient baobab trees and endemic flora and fauna. One might encounter the Endangered Mountain Reedbuck or get a glimpse of a leopard and any one of the many other species this mountain has to offer. It is the perfect place to unwind, relax, and take in the peace and beauty of the Soutpansberg mountains.

This is a very challenging hike, and a high level of fitness and hiking experience is required. But the challenge is rewarded with the fantastic hospitality experienced along the way, with all meals taken care of and luggage transferred from lodge to lodge. Hikers need only take a day pack with them to carry their own water, snack packs (provided by hosts), and hiking essentials.

- **Distance:** Approximately 66 km
- **Maximum Capacity:** Eight people sharing or four singles
- **Guide:** Yes, Soutpansberg Rangers accompany hikers on the trail
- **Age limit:** No under 16-year old's and must be accompanied by a guardian

Route Summary (66 km)

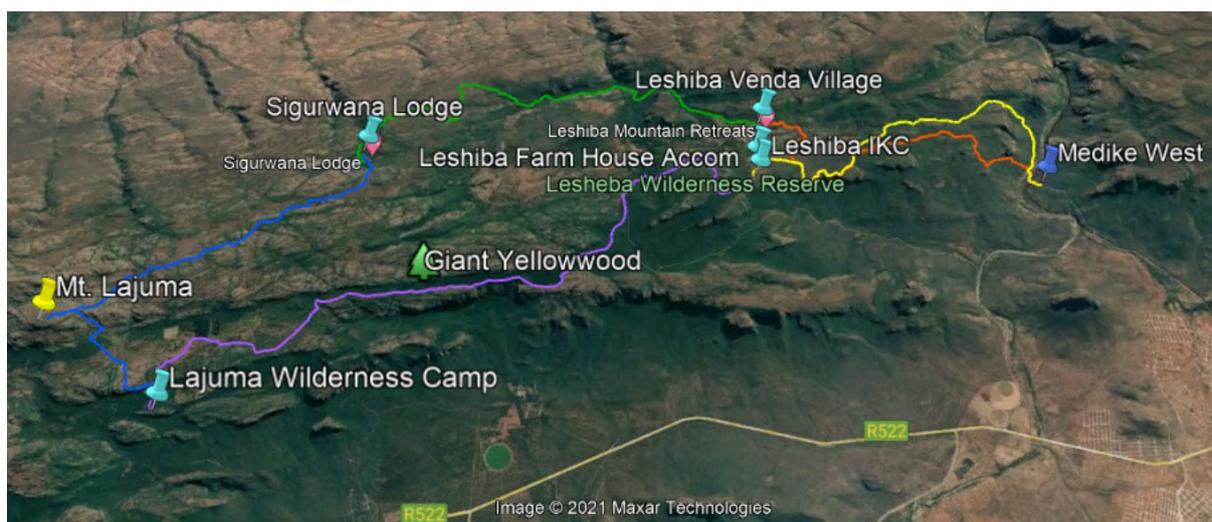
Day 1: Medike West to Leshiba IKC up Duluni Gorge (11 km)

Day 2: Leshiba IKC to Lajuma Wilderness Camp, through the yellowwood forest (18 km)

Day 3: Lajuma Wilderness Camp to Sigurwana Lodge via Mt. Ladjuma (13 km)

Day 4: Sigurwana Lodge to Leshiba Venda Village via Hamasha Gorge (13 km)

Day 5: Leshiba Venda Village back to Medike West (11 km)



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

The Route Day 1: Medike West to Leshiba IKC up Duluni Gorge

Distance: approx. 11 km

Difficulty: Difficult – official Green Flag Ratings coming soon!

Route Description:

The hike starts on the Sand River gorge at the Medike Nature Reserve Reception. From here, the trail heads across the river along a track to the Marula Camp Site, where it then ventures up the mountain. An initial steep, tough climb up a rocky hill offers magnificent views of Medike along the way until it reaches a plateau. The trail heads up Duluni Gorge from the plateau, winding its way alongside a stream beneath giant Waterberry and Forest Fever trees. The trail then heads into a clearing where it passes historical terraces where medicinal plants used to be grown. The Leshiba fence is crossed through a swing gate. Once on Leshiba, the trail heads across the plains towards the cliff edges, with magnificent views over the mountains and plains. The end of the trail follows farm tracks to the Leshiba Indigenous Knowledge Centre (IKC).

Accommodation:

[Home - Leshiba](#)

The first night is accommodated at Leshiba's Luvhondo Camp (IKC). The huts are fully serviced with bathrooms and hot showers. The fantastic Leshiba staff will welcome hikers and see to all their needs. Includes dinner, basic breakfast, and snack pack for the following day's hike.



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The Route Day 2: Leshiba IKC to Lajuma Wilderness Camp, through the yellowwood forest

Distance: approx. 18 km

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

Route Description:

This leg of the hike starts with a meander through the Leshiba plains, where game such as giraffe, zebra, Impala and wildebeest might be spotted. It then heads along Dead Man’s Bend and Black Mamba Ridge, which have amazing views over Leshiba before heading into Sigurwana. Once in Sigurwana, the trail follows a jeep track, some areas covered with large, incredible trees and some areas with no cover. This is a long and steady uphill, with a short scramble up some rocks towards the top of the hill, with a spectacular view over the farmlands and Sigurwana. The trail then meanders into a spectacular Yellowwood Forest. In the forest, hikers might be lucky enough to see a Red Duiker and hear the calls of the Purple Crested Turaco. The Yellowwood Forest has an air of peacefulness, and nothing else on the trail compares to this. Once out of the forest, the rest of this trail is open and not covered by big trees and is a fairly easy walk heading through old farmlands where cattle are still being kept. The last section of the trail is a very steep descent to Wilderness Camp on Lajuma takes you through a spectacular rock formation called ‘The Chimneys’, which requires some scrambling down the rocks. This descent is short but technical and will not be attempted in wet weather. An alternate route avoids ‘The Chimneys’ and is an easier descent, passing by a Macadamia orchard for hikers not comfortable with heights or in wet weather.

Accommodation:

Lajuma Research Centre’s Wilderness Camp offers basic accommodation designed for student groups. Dinner, basic breakfast, and a snack pack for the next day’s hike are provided.

[Conservation Research | Lajuma Research Centre](#)



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The Route Day 3: Lajuma Wilderness Camp to Sigurwana Lodge via Mt. Lajuma

Distance: 12–13 km

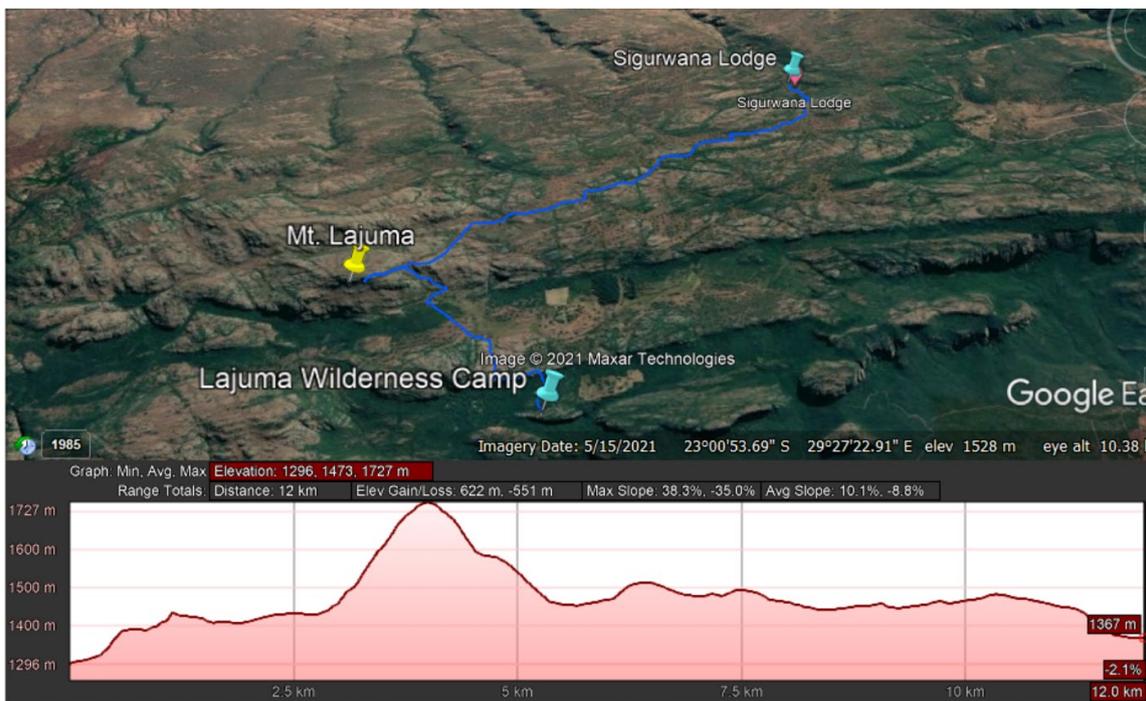
Difficulty: difficult to very difficult if ascending to the top of Mt Lajuma – official Green Flag Ratings coming soon!

Route Description:

This leg starts off either by heading up ‘The Chimneys’ again onto what is called ‘The Patches’, or an alternate route along a jeep track and Lajuma’s leopard trail can be used to access the patches for those not wanting to scramble up the Chimneys. The Patches area is open grasslands and termite mounds, where one might be lucky enough to spot Kudu or Mountain Reedbuck. The trail then starts heading up to Mount Letjume, the highest peak in the Soutpansberg mountain range, at 1,747 meters above sea level and about 800 meters above the surrounding plains. At the Saddle of Mount Letjume, hikers do have the option of diverting to the peak for spectacular panoramic views, a steep ascent to the top that follows the same route back to the Saddle. From the Saddle, the trail heads into Sigurwana with another steep descent off the mountain to reach the plains below. The trail then heads through Sigurwana grasslands and small forests where hikers might be lucky enough to spot plains game. There is a small river crossing that hikers can either take off their shoes and cross the river or clamber up some rocks to cross higher up. On the final approach to the lodge, there is a steep descent down a rocky slope along a river and waterfall. This is a technical descent, but the views most definitely make it worth it, with a waterfall on the right-hand side and swifts dipping in and out of the water.

Accommodation: [Home - Sigurwana Lodge](#)

Sigurwana offers luxury accommodation, fully serviced rooms, and hot water showers. Includes dinner, breakfast, and snack pack for the day.



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The Route Day 4: Sigurwana Lodge to Leshiba Venda Village via Hamasha Gorge

Distance: Approx. 12–13 km

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

Route Description:

The leg starts with departing from Sigurwana Lodge through a small marshy area, with a short steep descent down a rocky ledge into a streambed. After this, a climb brings the trail onto an open plateau. Hikers should look out for Blue Wildebeest, Sable Antelope and zebras. After a wonderful hike on the plateau, the trail reaches the Leshiba fence line with a gate. It then traverses along a mountain ridge, hugging the ridge, with beautiful mountain views into Hamasha Gorge below. The trail then descends into the gorge, with a beautiful lunch stop under shaded trees next to the Hamasha stream. The trail then descends further into the gorge, following the stream, where it then crosses down ‘The Slabs’. These are big, red, angled rock slabs that need to be traversed to get to the bottom of the gorge. This section is very technical, and care needs to be taken. An alternative route is available for those who do not want to walk over the angled rock slabs and for days when the slabs are too dangerous due to weather, as they will be very slippery when wet. The trail levels out at the bottom of the gorge for a short while before climbing up and out the other side. The climb is relatively long, but it is on a beautiful trail through a forested area. There is an option of popping out of the forest and onto a rocky ledge with views back over the gorge. Further up the trail, it reaches Leshiba plains. Hikers can divert again off the trail to visit bushman paintings (a short, steep climb to the paintings).

Accommodation: [Home - Leshiba](#)

Leshiba Venda Village offers luxury accommodation and is the perfect place to sit and reminisce on the trail’s adventures. Huts are fully serviced, and dinner, breakfast, and snack packs are provided.

Optional extra: hikers can upgrade to Leshiba Lavish Suites to experience ultimate luxury (R300 pp extra)



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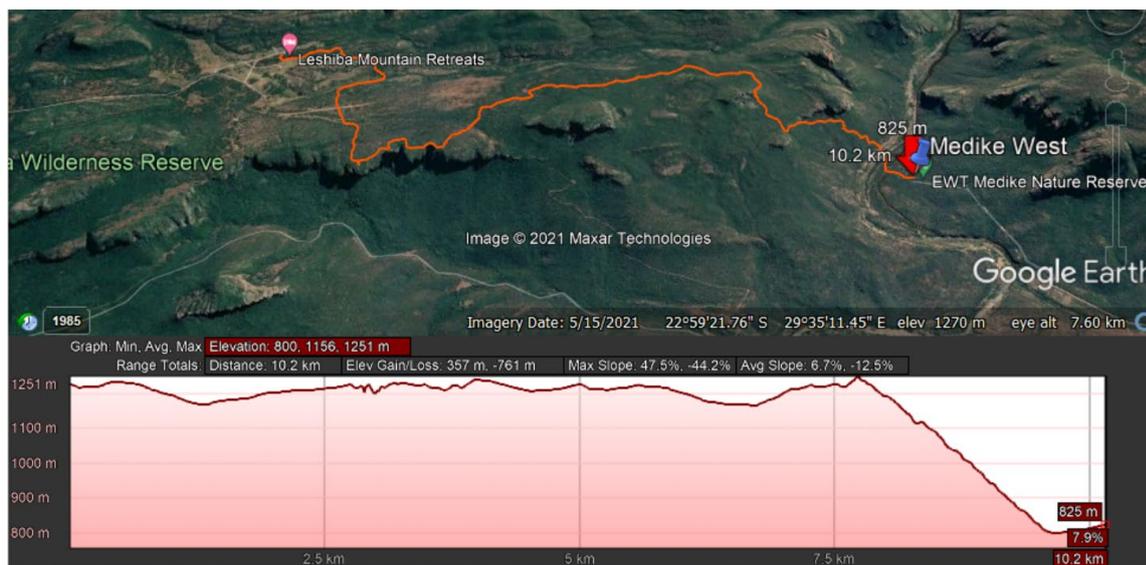
The Route Day 5: Leshiba Venda Village back to Medike West via the cliff edges

Distance: Approx. 11 km

Difficulty: difficult and steep descent – official Green Flag Ratings coming soon!

Route Description:

The final day departs from Leshiba Lodge, following a trail across the Leshiba plains where hikers are likely to see a variety of plains game or even spot a Cape Vulture. The trail then heads past five different viewpoints along the cliff edge, which all have their own unique beauty. It is a gentle start while hiking back towards Medike Reserve. Once beyond the viewpoints, the trail reaches the Leshiba/Medike fence line with a small gate to crawl through. Following this, the trail heads up an incline until it flattens out again at the top of the mountain with incredible views over Medike and surrounding areas. The trail then descends the mountain. It is a long and steep descent, and care needs to be taken. It passes an old settlement ruin along the way. After the long, steep descent, the Sand River valley floor is reached, and hikers then make their way back to Medike Reception, crossing over the railway line, to finish off the trail.



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.

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.

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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:

Slackpackers on the Western Loop:

An EWT backup bakkie will take overnight luggage from lodge to lodge (or Research centre). Hikers need only take an appropriate day pack for the day. Hikers need to carry all their own water and snack packs for the day.

Additional items:

- Day pack
- Hat
- Sunblock
- Appropriate hiking boots or trail shoes
- First aid kit
- Snacks
- Water bottle
- Two-litre container to carry daily snack pack in your backpack

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