Hiking Constantia Nek: When “Easy” Isn’t Quite So Easy

There’s something about travel that opens you up to taking advice you probably wouldn’t take at home. Especially when that advice comes from people who casually run the Comrades Marathon and make it sound like a light jog around the block.

The night before our hike, we had spent the evening with friends we hadn’t seen in ages. One of those evenings where time slips away unnoticed, stories stretch longer than planned, and suddenly it’s close to midnight before you even think about heading home. Somewhere between the catching up and the laughter, the conversation turned to our plans to go up Table Mountain.

Our plan was simple, take the cable car, enjoy the views, tick the box. But that idea didn’t last long.

“Why don’t you hike up Constantia Nek instead?” they suggested. “It’s a much better experience.”

Now, when advice like that comes from people who have run multiple Comrades, you assume they know what they’re talking about. What we didn’t fully appreciate at the time was that their version of “a good hike” and ours might differ slightly.

Slightly being the key word.

Despite the late night, we were up early and at the start by 6am. Uncle Dave, fully committing to the morning’s energy, had already run from his house to meet us there. That probably should have been our first clue.

We set off feeling optimistic. The description we’d been given painted a fairly relaxed picture, a gentle jeep track, a bit winding, a gradual incline. Manageable. Enjoyable. Almost leisurely.

And for a while, it was exactly that.

The early morning air was cool, the light soft, and the surroundings beautiful in that quiet, understated way the Cape does so well. It felt like the kind of hike where you can take your time, chat as you go, and just ease into the day.

Then it changed.

Gradually at first, then very suddenly.

The path grew steeper, the “jeep track” became less defined, and the incline seemed to just keep going. What had started as a relaxed walk turned into something that demanded a lot more effort than expected. The kind of climb where conversations fade, replaced by the rhythm of your own breathing and the steady focus of putting one foot in front of the other.

It was tough. Properly tough.

Somewhere along the way, I had to admit to myself that I might not be quite as fit as I’d like to think. But by that point, turning back wasn’t really an option. So we kept going.

Step by step, slowly but surely.

By the time we reached the top, it was around 10am, a lot later than anticipated, and we were completely spent. But standing there, looking out over the landscape, it all made sense again. That feeling of having earned the view, of having worked for it, hits differently.

There was a small, natural water tap flowing at the top, with a sign politely warning you to drink at your own risk. At that stage, risk assessment wasn't really part of the equation. We were thirsty, and that water tasted like the best decision we'd made all morning.

We spent some time up there, catching our breath, reapplying sunscreen, and just taking it all in. The beauty of the Cape stretching out around us, a reminder of why you say yes to these kinds of experiences in the first place.

The descent, thankfully, was far kinder. Easier on the lungs, easier on the legs, and somehow lighter in spirit. There were even a few dogs along the way, which always seems to lift the mood no matter how tired you are.

By the time we got back to the bottom, we were completely finished. Tired, dehydrated, and very ready for showers and food. The rest of the day was spent recovering, doing very little, and appreciating the simple comfort of not having to climb anything.

Looking back, it was absolutely worth it.

But if there's one takeaway from the whole experience, it's this, never blindly trust the definition of "easy" when it comes from someone who runs ultramarathons for fun.