

Middle East

TURKEY

Mt. Ararat, northeast rib/face. On July 27, a group of climbers from five countries made an ascent of the northeast flank of Mt. Ararat (16,940') near the borders of Armenia and Iran in northeast Turkey. The team was comprised of Marcelo Buraglia (Columbia), Khoo Swee Chiou (Singapore), Tunc Findik (Turkey), David D. Keaton (US), Nasuh Maruhki (Turkey), Ricardo Torres Nava (Mexico), and Fernando Gonzales Rubio (Columbia). One of the expedition goals was to help raise awareness and support for several charities including the Babu Chiri School in Nepal and the Istanbul-based AKUT search and rescue team. The ascent alternated between a rib of funky rock and a series of snowfields. A short section of 50-degree ice led to the summit icecap and the east summit, which was traversed to reach the main top. The line, vexed by rockfall, may not have seen a previous ascent. Western



Mt. Ararat from the northeast. The climbing route follows snowfields on the rib descending leftward from the summit. *David D. Keaton*

climbers have typically been restricted to the mountain's southern route, but the lesser known northern approaches offer new route possibilities including the unclimbed and horrific looking Ahora Gorge. A more detailed report can be found at www.holy-landexpeditions.com.

DAVID D. KEATON

IRAN

Alam Kuh, north wall, new route, second winter ascent of the face, and historical reporting. A joint team comprising members from two Iranian clubs (Arash Group and Damavand Club) led by Mohammad Mousavinejad, spent 16 days in February opening a new route. Anjoman, named after the newly (2000) formed Anjoman Kuhnavardi Iran (The Iranian Alpine Club), is the first new route to be climbed on the north face of Alam Kuh during the winter. Alam Kuh (4850m) is the



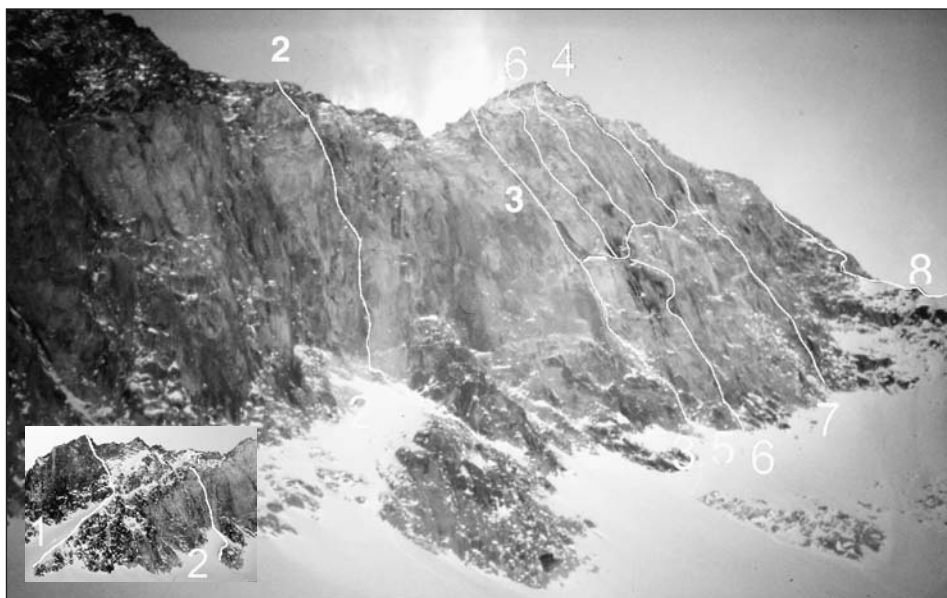
The summit of Mt. Ararat in eastern Turkey following a rare ascent from the northeast. *David D. Keaton*

third highest summit in Iran (after Damavand, 5671m, and Salavan, 4900m) but its 500- to 600-meter granite north face is undoubtedly the most prestigious in the country.

Alam Kuh was probably first climbed by the Bornmuller brothers (two German botanists) in 1902 via the easy south flank. The second ascent was made in 1933 by the British explorer and mountaineer, Sir Douglas Busk, via the east ridge (Siah Sang). The first ascent from the north came in 1936 when Gorter and Steinauer climbed the north ridge, separating the north and northwest faces. In 1951 Jalil Katibei and Mohammad Ali Tafreshi climbed the north wall of peak Shakhak. That was very astonishing in those days. This route has not been repeated yet, though some climbs of the easier ground to the right of the route have been done.

To the left of it (not seen in the photo) on the same day Naser Fallah, Ali Asghar Ordookhani, and Mehdi Sedghi Nejad climbed the steep snow slopes of the face between peak Shakhak and peak Siah Sang. This route probably has not been repeated. The first route on the true north face of Alam Kuh was first climbed in 1964 by German, Herman Rost and Iranian, Amir Alai. Two years later Blassier, Fresafond, Parat, and Valencot from a French expedition climbed a second route on the north face and in 1969 the Poles, Dobek, Wroz, and Waligora, added a third. The early 70s saw a spate of new routes on the previously unclimbed northwest face (Italians in 1970, Poles in 1971 and the first all-Iranian route in 1973). Poles returned to the north face in 1973, when Stama and others climbed the Great Roof. After the Islamic Revolution in 1978 the mountain was left for a while to Iranians. In 1983 a team led by the late A Azizi completed the first Iranian route on the north face, while over three years from 1982-84 Asgari, Babai, Mohammadi and others put up the Arash Route. From 1988 to 1991 several short routes and important variants were established by Iranian climbers. However, 1991 was notable for the first winter ascent of the north face.

Attempts at a winter ascent go back to 1974 (Poles). From 1980 to 1991 a handful of Iranian climbers tried the wall and all failed. One was killed and a number suffered frostbite. The main difficulty is the cold, with temperatures down to -40°C at night and -20°C during the day. Powder snow avalanches also provide regular problems. In winter of 1991 another large Iranian team tried the wall, only to complete three pitches of the Arash route in 20 days on the mountain. One member, Ishkhan Ebrahimi, suffered severe frostbite, which resulted in the amputation of all his toes and some of his fingers. However, in this large team there remained one determined climber. Mohammad Nouri wanted to climb the wall at any cost. He eventually



The north face of Alam Kuh in winter, Iran. Routes: (1) Katibei-Tafreshi, 1951, on Shakhak, was remarkable for its time; (2) Anjoman, 2001; (3) Rhost-Amiralai, 1964; (4) French, 1966; (5) Arash, 1982-1984; (6) Polish, 1973; (7) Polish, 1969; (8) German pillar, 1936. *Ramin Shojaei*

soloed the Arash route in four days. Since then several alpinists have attempted the face but failed...until the winter of 2001.

On February 6 the team (comprising Mohammad Moosavi Nejad—leader, Ramin Shojaei—technical leader, Ara Megerdichian, Esmail Motehayer Pasand, Kazem Faridian, Mohammad Nouri—cameraman, Ali Parsai, Abbas Aghasi, Abbas Mohammadi, Mahyar Pour Abdollah, Afshin Lahouri, Mehdi Broumand, Omid Amohammadi, and Ali Haji Saeed) reached Alamchal, the cwm below the face. While the others erected a hut below the face, Megerdichian and I started fixing the first pitch below the Golesang, the névé at the base of the wall. The following day I fixed another 200 meters of rope to the base of the wall.

The next day Faridian, belayed by Megerdichian, took the lead on the first pitch of the main wall. Near the start he fell on rock that was not so steep and injured his ankle. After carrying him down to Roodbarak in one and a half days, three team members, along with five new ones, came back. Meanwhile Megerdichian and I had stayed behind and led the first two pitches on the main wall.

A further pitch and a half were climbed over the 13th and 14th, after which it snowed for two days. Five members left. With Nouri filming, Megerdichian and I continued climbing over the next few days and on the 20th I completed the fifth pitch to reach the less steep, loose summit rock band. I placed the Iranian flag at the high point and then climbed down 10 meters to install a safe belay. That day we cleaned pitches four and five but due to snowfall left the remainder to be cleared on the following weekend. Our route Anjoman was graded VI A3 5.8

While we were on the wall Mohammadi and Nouri took two days off to repeat their 1990 first winter ascents of the Haft Khanha peaks (ca 4700m). They were away from Alamchal camp for two days and climbed three peaks. At the same time Amohammadi and Saeed climbed the nearby Shaneh Kuh and Miansechal peaks (4300m).

RAMIN SHOJAEL, *Iran*

Africa

EGYPT

Red Sea Mountains, an historical overview and recent first ascents. Following the discovery of an old book by G.W. Murray entitled *Dare Me To The Desert* (1967), in which the author describes his explorations of Egypt's Red Sea Mountains in the 1920s and 30s, Di Taylor and I decided to follow in his footsteps. Delving into archives revealed that Murray was a Director of the Egyptian Desert Survey in the early decades of the last century. He was also a respected member of the Alpine Club and the Royal Geographical Society, the latter awarding him their Founder's Medal. He served as an officer in the Northern Red Sea Patrol in the 1914-18 war and was awarded the Military Cross. Not only did he obviously know his



subject well, scattering his pages liberally with unclimbed or otherwise attractive peaks, but very few climbers seemed to have been there and possibly none since the 1930s. We were hooked.

Our first attempt in 1988 was turned back by endless sandstorms and unexpected military checkpoints. Our second attempt in 1996 was an almost equal disaster. Despite sponsorship by Egypt's Tourism Authority and an Egyptian travel agent, the military refused to recognize our permits to what is a closed area of the Nubian Desert near the Sudan Border. Our planned exploration of the other parts of the Red Sea Massif was also inexplicably cut by the travel agent from five weeks to one—not much time for 600 miles of mountains.

Nevertheless, we located many of Murray's more northerly peaks in the Eastern Desert and managed to climb briefly on some. The granite was not perfect but definitely climbable and good in the water-worn gullies, where some Bedouin hunting routes exist. We also discovered that the renowned Italian climber, Emilio Comici, had been there in 1937, climbing several peaks the same year as Murray. The most interesting seems to be Gebel Shayib (2187m) the highest on the Egyptian mainland, climbed by Murray on April 26, 1922 and by Comici on April 29, 1937. The Austrian Alpine Club also climbed several peaks in this area during 1931. Adjacent to Shayib, Gebel Qattar (1963m) and other summits just to the north were climbed by Comici in 1937 (all these mountains in this area are accessible from the coastal resort of Hurghada). Gebel Gharib (1750m) is a couple of hours drive further north again. First climbed on the remarkably early date of April 29, 1823 by British explorer J. Burton, the peak was also climbed twice in 1937, first by Murray on February 22, then by Comici on April 3—a busy year for Egypt's mountains. In addition to these existing routes, all this area offers interesting exploration potential with climbs up to 900 meters in length, some of which could be good quality. Intrigued by our discoveries, and in honor of Comici, some Italian climbers visited this area in autumn 2000, making some new ascents.

In spring 2001 we decided to try our luck a third time with the mysterious “forbidden” southern peaks. Here, not far from the disputed border with Sudan, lies Murray's “unclimbable glass dome” in a remote part of the desert. Nearby, just above the wild and empty coast, are the Farayid Mountains “the most aggressive in Egypt.” This dramatic massif is also the location of Murray's rock bridge “which seemed to sway in the throb in the wind” and the Berenice Bodkin, “sharper and more vertical than the Aiguille du Géant, rising exactly on the Tropic of Cancer,” which Murray “left alone in its austerity.”

After considerable preparation with a new travel agent and some last minute fears that the trip was going to fail yet again due to continuing Egyptian military intransigence, we finally got our permits—all five of them. We were also given an escort in the form of a soldier “for our security,” before finally making it into the desert together with climbing friends Mark Carr and Christine Evans. Driving the two vehicles, which were compulsory for a journey through this remote area, were Tamer El Sayed and Hany Amr, the directors of two Egyptian safari companies (Nomad Adventure Tours and Dune Desert Adventures), both keen to extend their desert knowledge.

Due to last-minute permit problems, our planned 17 days visit had shrunk to 10. This left us with about a week in the desert, 600 miles south of Cairo. It's a particularly wild and beautiful area nearly 500 meters above sea level, studded with large acacia trees, supporting herds of gazelle and, nearer the coast (four days' camel ride), scattered families of sword-carrying Ababda Bedouin, eking out a hard traditional life of camel breeding and charcoal making.

Our first objective, Gebel Sila'i (baldhead) “as sheer and smooth and unclimbable as The Hill of Glass” (756m) proved unexpectedly easy: Murray had failed to find the one reasonable

route up this ca 300-meter-high, atrociously exfoliating, granite dome. It will be an excellent "trekking peak" if the area ever opens up, with magnificent panoramic views in all directions. A black basalt intrusion may offer a possible direct route but even it is obviously loose in places due to the extremes of temperature.

The Rock Bridge was truly spectacular; a ca 50-meter flying buttress of bizarre shape and proportions "like a tea cup handle" as Murray described it. We did a 250-meter route up the crag, climbing through the arch to the summit, extracting the maximum enjoyment from this most unusual rock architecture. The temperature on the top (in mid March) was 100°F. The climb was straightforward but as on Sila'i, the granite was disturbingly creaky.

Elsewhere in the massif of The Farayids (1366m), known as Mons Pentadactylus ("five finger mountain" to the Romans), there are numerous other impressive peaks with cliffs up to 300 meters high. Situated on the Tropic of Cancer, the Berenice Bodkin (1230m) is one of them but we only had time to find a way in to its base for future reference. It's definitely climbable from the northeast and the steep 150-meter upper cliff may be of better rock. On its north side slabs sweep up into a vertical, or possibly overhanging, headwall, in total 300 meters high. Just north of The Bodkin (also known as The Dagger of Berenice) the steep cliffs on the south face of Purdy's Peak (height unknown) looked equally, or even more, impressive. Whether or not any of these cliffs are climbable by a sane person is another matter. The only way to find out is to get on them.

Despite its brevity, it was a fascinating trip, allowing us not only to experience the joys of exploration and the ascent of new climbs, but also and equally importantly, to spend a little time with the Bedouin. Living four days' camel ride from the coast, they are still leading a traditional life. However, changes are inevitable—a new international airport is under construction 100 miles away on the coast, near Mersa Allam. New Red Sea coastal resorts for divers and sun-seekers are rapidly spreading south towards the area we visited. No doubt permits will be relaxed and the timeless solitude of the desert, its mountains, wildlife and people, will be faced with the arrival of mass-tourism as visitors escape the coast for desert safaris. It could spell the end for the people and wildlife, though if organized with forethought and consideration it could also be an opportunity for a new beginning. It will certainly allow the climbing and trekking community easier access. We are hopeful that our report to those concerned with Egypt's tourism and environment will contribute to protecting the future of this unique area and its indigenous people.

Useful contacts If you plan to go 'off road' you will almost certainly need permits, in which case you will need the assistance of an Egyptian tour agent. Permits, transport, and provisions for the above trip were arranged by Tamer el Sayed, Nomad Adventure Tours, 155 Al Sudan Street, Mohandessin, Cairo, Egypt, e-mail: nomad@sitravel.com.eg; in co-operation with Hany Amr, Egyptian Adventures, 58 Abdullah abu el-sude St, 1163 Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt, e-mail: hanyamr@hotmail.com. Both these companies would be pleased to quote you for desert tours such as The Western Desert Oases, Gilf Kebir (SW Desert), Sinai, The Red Sea Mountains etc. Allow one month (maybe longer) to obtain Permits.

TONY HOWARD, *United Kingdom*

MALI

Hombori Mountains, new route. From November 20 to January 14 my brother Michael and I visited the Hand of Fatima in the Hombori Mountains. On Kaga Pamari we established a new route up the center of the southwest face, completing the line in the first week of December. The route is 400 meters in length and follows a crack system (finger to shoulder width). The maximum difficulties are French 7a. All belays were bolted, but nuts and cams are needed for protection. The route is situated just left of the 1993 Albert/Arnold line, Wanangaba Maby.

JENS RICHTER, *Germany*

MADAGASCAR

General information. For a selection of topo and photo diagrams, look at the two websites, www.madamax.com/camp-catta and www.campcatta.com. Local climbers and Camp Catta staff are encouraging exploration of the giant boulders around the forest, some 40 to 50 meters high. Last season there was a lot of bouldering carried out around Camp Catta and if development continues, the site could gain international recognition for its bouldering alone.

GILLES GAUTIER, *Madagascar*

Tsaranoro Be, new routes. The prominent series of corners that form the right side of the Yellow Pillar left of Gondwanaland was climbed in May by South Africans, Alard Hüfner, Mike Mason, and Matthew Munting. This “classic” line had been attempted on several occasions before by climbers of high caliber such as Arnaud Petit, but the highest point gained appears to have been approximately halfway up the route. Reports suggest that heavily vegetated cracks had put off a number of climbers. Christened Vazimba, the new 800-meter line was climbed in 18 pitches with difficulties up to 7a maximum. Camalots to size 5 are required.

A month later a Spanish-Swiss team comprising Toni Arbones, Benoît Dormaz, and Miriam Richard completed a sensational line up the front face of the Yellow Pillar left of Vazimba. Vazaha M’Tapitapy (Crazy White Men) is 650 meters in height and 16 pitches in length, entirely equipped with 160 stainless steel bolts. The team appears to have terminated their route at the top of the pillar, though it would be possible to continue up to the summit by following the last few pitches of Vazimba. The climbing is very sustained with 10 of the pitches 6c or above and the crux eighth pitch thought possibly to be as hard as 8a. Local activists report that this may be the best line to date in the country.

Right of Gondwanaland the 1999 Swiss Route, Norspace (Walter von Ballmoos/Stephan Salm: 16 pitches; 7a max) was re-equipped by von Ballmoos, with Jürg Bernhard, Andreas Bähler, Curdin Gliott, and Viktor Schwarz. Originally, the 73 protection bolts were placed with a hand drill making the Swiss party the only team since Albert and Arnold on their first visit in 1995 not to use a power drill to create a first ascent on the big walls of Tsaranoro. After consultation with Salm, von Ballmoos decided to re-equip the route, bolt for bolt, using a power drill and the best quality long-life bolts. It took five days with one rest day to complete the job, climbing twice up to pitch six, then finishing the rest from above. However, one bolt was added to pitch six. Then on a subsequent day von Ballmoos redpointed the route, except for a rest

point on pitch 9 and pitches 14 to 16, where ropes had been left for the team to finish this section in the dark. The grade was confirmed as solid 7a (in August 1999 Misako Koyanagi, Jim Haden, and Mike Libeck climbed all the difficulties at 5.11c/d before rappelling from the top of the 14th pitch, while on the second complete ascent—in 2000—Alexander Buzinkay and Rado Staruch felt the protection to be very well spaced and rated the crux as 7a+).

Norspace was attempted in October by the British climbers mentioned below. Incidentally, the name comes from a young boy who was at Camp Catta at the time of the first ascent. At the same time as the Swiss were at work on their route, the all-female team sponsored by The North Face was creating Bravo les Filles. The young lad was always talking about “norspace” rather than “north face” and the name stuck.

GILLES GAUTIER, *Madagascar* AND GRZEGORZ GLAZEK, *Poland*

Lemur Wall, new route. To the right of Pectorine, in the vicinity of the huge broken flake, Swiss climbers, Jurg Bernhard and Andreas Bähler, created a new four-pitch route christened, La Voie Plaisir des Guides Suisses. The climb was put up on the 26th September and has difficulties of 6c, 6a obl. The pair set out to create a real ‘plaisir’ route and the result is a very well-equipped sport climb with 14 bolts on the crux pitch. However, the route was opened from the top.

Traditionally, routes in the area were opened from the ground up. The first to be equipped by rappel, Tsaky-Tasky on Lemur Wall (Duteurtre/Tiberghien, 1998: 7a+), came in for some criticism. Local climbers comment that this criticism was well-founded as the route was disappointing and showed the first ascensionists’ lack of experience. However, they feel the new Swiss route is different, as it is an excellent climb, strongly recommended, and has already seen around a dozen repeat ascents. They are quite happy for routes to be opened in this fashion, as long as the result is a very good climb that is accessible to many visiting parties.

MOUNTAIN INFO, *High Mountain Sports*

Tsaranoro, various climbs and new routes. Dave Kenyon and I arrived at Camp Catta on September 19. Our first three days were spent repeating the excellent existing routes, Alien II (350m 6b), Croix du Sud (300m 6b+), and Pectorine (250m 6b/A0) on a variety of crags to get a feel for the place, the coarse granite, the style of climbing, and the intense heat.

September 24-27 were spent on the water-streaked dome of Vato Varindry, a boulder by the standards of the area being a mere 320 meters high and 600 meters wide with only two existing climbs. During those days we opened a new route from the ground up, the local ethic. The result was a seven-pitch 6c (maximum and obligatory), which we called Malagasy Maroto (Madagascan Hammer) in memory of the happy hours Dave spent hand drilling on pitch two.

September 29 saw us going for the alpine start in order to repeat the superb Out of Africa (600m, 14 pitches) on Tsaranoro Kely. A fantastic route, that saves its 7a+ crux for the last pitch. The ascent took us eight hours and the abseil descent a further two hours. After a brief look at the new route potential on the right hand section of Lemur Wall and Mitsin Joarivo, we decided once more to focus our activity on Vato Varindry, where we spent five days opening an eight-pitch (325m) route, on which the first five bolts were placed from skyhooks. The result, Karma Chameleon (7a+max/6c obligatory) was finally completed on October 7.

October 8 started early in order to attempt the bold and impressive Norspace on Tsaranoro Be. We backed off after six pitches due to Dave's fingers and my head being in bits. The climbing up to that point was good but worrying due to the slightly friable nature of the rock and the scarcity of bolts. A bit of traffic should result in the route becoming a classic. We salvaged the day by repeating the highly enjoyable Le Cas Nullard (a classic 450m 6a) and traversing Karambony in order to look for the further new routing projects.

Oct. 9 and 10 saw Dave desperately trying to re-grow his finger tips, whilst I opened up the amenable Lemurs Ripped my Flesh (220m, 6b+ max or 5+ with two points of aid) on Karambony's lower slabs (Editors note: it appears that the first part of this route, as far as the half-way ledge, had previously been climbed four years ago by Gilles Gautier with his daughter and named Baba Kely, 5+).

October 11 and 12 saw the drilling continue as we ascended a groove line high up on Karambony to produce the jolly Le Mur Lemur (100m: 6b+ max and obligatory). Our final route before the tortuous journey home. In total we repeated five of the Massif's 28 routes and climbed four new lines (22 pitches, 1000m) on which we placed 120 protection bolts and 42 belay bolts over the course of 13 days new-routing in the baking sun. The members of the expedition would like to thank the Karabiner Mountaineering Club, Bendcrete Climbing Walls, Fuji, and Hilti for their generous support that helped to make this expedition a success.

DUNCAN LEE, *England*

The Sea Cliffs, new sport routes. Michel Piola and Benoit Robert returned to the North Coast for a couple of weeks during June and July to create 66 new pitches on Madagascar's northern limestone in the vicinity of Diego Suarez. These new sport climbs are at the two venues; Montagne des Francais and Nosy Hara. The popularity of this area is increasing fast and in addition to the new Piola routes, other climbers added a further 14 pitches.

However, environmental agencies such as World Wildlife Fund and Conservation International are trying to obtain a marine reserve status for the archipelago. Fortunately for climbers, the protests of local people have been heeded and it is thought that both Nosy Andantsara and Anjombavola should receive a special status that will allow tourist activities. Nosy Hara is still under discussion, as so far the proposed special status is likely to allow only access to the beaches and not the cliffs. Either way, it is possible that much of the interior of the island will remain totally preserved.

GILLES GAUTIER, *Madagascar*

MOZAMBIQUE

Sitting Chief. I was part of a joint Mountain Club of South Africa/British Mountaineering Council expedition to northern Mozambique and we were successful in climbing our objective, Sitting Chief (local name, Murupie). We had quite an adventure getting there with 10 of us in two cars. One car was a double cab Toyota Hilux and the other an old Land Rover Forward Control, which although big and slow, is strong and has loads of character.

Just before the Zimbabwe border, the head gasket of the Hilux blew, so nine of us and all our big wall gear and equipment squashed into the Landrover for a very slow drive through

Zimbabwe, Tete Corridor, Malawi, and finally Mozambique. After five days of travelling we eventually arrived at Lalaua, a village near Sitting Chief. About an hour later and to everyone's amazement, Pieter Martin arrived in the Hilux. He had stayed behind in Masina to get the head gasket fixed and then drove 2500 km on his own to catch up with us.

The Administrator in Lalaua would not give us permission to climb the dome, as according to a Dutch company, who had carried out a survey, the neighboring area contained valuable minerals and no one was now allowed to enter. We therefore drove three hours on bad roads to the capital city of the north, Nampula, where we spoke with the Governor. He gave us permission to climb.

The climbing on Sitting Chief looked as though it would be interesting from a distance, as the face contained huge huecos. We split up into four parties and attempted different lines. It turned out that after a couple of pitches the rock became covered in thick lichen, which made for unpleasant climbing. All attempts were aborted at various heights. Next, we focused our energies on reaching the summit via a huge corner system. This provided for some interesting climbing up corners and chimneys at about grade 23. Pieter Martin, Peter Robins, and Dave Turnbull were first on the summit, followed by Leo Houlding, myself and Mark Seuring. The day before Ben Bransby and Andrew Donson had reached a point one pitch from the summit before turning back as it was getting late. Matthew Munting and Izak Steyn retreated from their route.

We then headed off to Mlema 3 to do some real climbing on African Light, the route that Mark and I had opened in 2000. However, it rained (yes, rain in the middle of winter). Andy, Ben, and Dave spent a miserable night bivouacking in the rain at the base of the climb. They had planned to bivouac on Bundu ledge but the rain caught them three pitches up and as it was getting dark, they abseiled down and sat out the night in the rain. With spirits dampened and the weather looking grim, we headed off to lake Malawi. Here we relaxed in the sun and did some kayaking with Kayak Africa.

After another three days of traveling (by now we were well accustomed to this), we arrived at Blyde River Canyon. Here, we opened some amazing routes. This was definitely the climbing highlight of the trip. A couple of climbs at 26 were opened on sight. Then onto the Restaurant, where after two days of clipping bolts it was time for the British contingent to leave South Africa, everyone in agreement that we had enjoyed a great time together and got on very well.

ALARD HÜFNER, *Mountain Club of South Africa*