

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 Hufner, 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 Vie 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 (Duteurte/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.