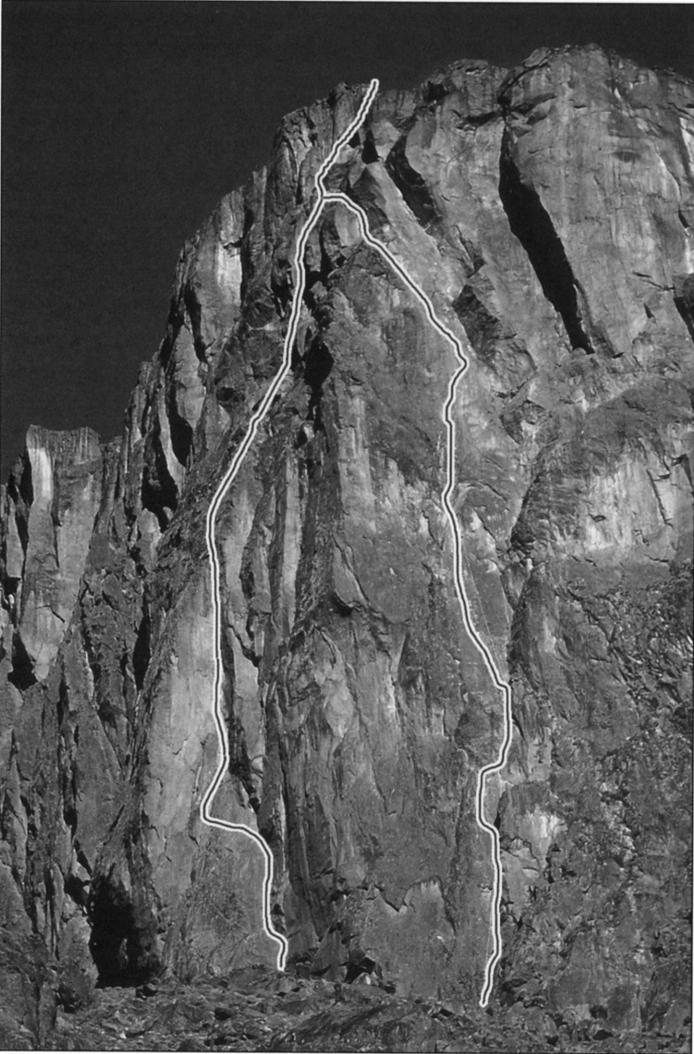


THE TEMPLE

Worshipping at Mt. Kenya's feet, the Nithi Gorge.

ALEXANDER JAKUBOWSKI



The Temple in the Nithi Gorge: Angelfish (left: E4 6a, Gibson-Jakubowski, 2004) and Brew Up Audrey (E4 6b, Dunn-Winston, 2004). Ben Winston, www.BenWinston.co.uk

Flicking through a back issue of *High* magazine in the St. Govans Inn at Pembroke one night, I came across an article about climbing in Kenya written by UK South West legend Pat Littlejohn. The article celebrated the joys of free climbing on medium-sized walls in the Kenyan bush. It spoke of giant thorns, leopards, snakes, and acres upon acres of unclimbed rock. Staring out from the center spread was a huge, orange prow jutting out of the skirts of Mt. Kenya with the word “unclimbed” beneath it. I had found the Temple and I knew that I must worship there.

Six months later I found myself in Chogoria (2,000m), the last town to the west of Mt. Kenya. This is the start of the Chogoria route up to the Austrian Hut on Mt. Kenya, and a favorite with the more accomplished trekker. Supplies are best purchased in one of the bigger towns such as Nanyuki, where supermarkets can be found. However, porters and transport can be arranged with very little bother in Chogoria, where we hired a Land Rover to the park gates and Banda’s, a cluster of trekkers’ huts. From there it was a day’s walk up to Lake Michaelson, where we camped, enjoying fresh water from the stream that runs down the valley. Lake Michaelson is the most beautiful place you will ever be.

Despite reports of a wall over 300 meters high, it turned out to be closer to 200 meters. In the next days our team of Toby Dun, Miles Gibson, Ben Winston, and me forced two lines up The Temple’s wall. The first was the one I had seen in the magazine. It stands out from the left, from the right, and from in front. It is the corner in the arête and heads straight up into a roof. No climber could miss it, and certainly not the likes of Pat Littlejohn. Miles and I stepped up, and the first pitch fell easily until we came to a halt at a hairline corner crack. Miles led a spooky traverse left and then up (E4 6a) to put pay to this and finished at Littlejohn’s old high point, which was marked by some abseil tat. The next pitch is the glory pitch, a long never-ending crack corner (E4 5c).

After that, the wall opens out and a new router is faced with a myriad of opportunity. We let the line take us and headed up and right for a further three pitches to emerge at the very point of the prow. We called the route Angelfish, but that’s another story.

The next route, put up by Toby Dunn and Ben Winston, heads up to reach a crack system in the upper wall that can be seen all the way from Lake Michaelson. It starts up a dirty, loose corner at the far left end of the right side of the prow. This was followed by an incongruous pitch of technical and scary climbing at E5 6a, which required cleaning from pegs en route. The pegs were then eliminated and the pitch went free.

The route then launched up a further three pitches of outstanding crack climbing that ranged from body jamming through off width and down to thin fingers. It took some black bits, some orange bits, and some naughty bits. Just as with Angelfish, the upper wall provides a new router with endless possibilities. They, too, let the line take them and headed left, finishing up the final 10 meters of our route. Both routes are high quality expeditions and can be done in a long day each by a competent party. However, watch out for the wind and the cold. The minute the sun goes in and the wind picks up, you are transported from searing Africa to high altitude, sub-zero Mt. Kenya. This change is not as good as a rest.

The Temple holds endless opportunities for new routing. Some fairly amenable-looking lines on the right wings contrast with all-out finger-searing prizefights up the walls between the two established routes. Go there, enjoy, and say hello to those who sometimes descend from the sky to fish Lake Michaelson. We enjoyed trout for tea on New Year’s Eve.