

crux eighth pitch with rest points, but it was finally free-climbed in 2004 by the Spanish Pou brothers at 8b (5.13d). After three days of practice, both Hari and I led the route free in a day for the second and third free ascents.

The rest of our time we spent at Diego Suarez (Atsiranana) in the north of the island. This is a city of beautiful women, beaches, and limestone climbing on the mainland and nearby small islands. We recommend a visit and believe you will enjoy Madagascar as much as we did.

ONDRA BENES, *Czech Republic*

*Editor's note: Both Benes and Berger were in good form before this visit with 23-year-old Benes having just made a rare repeat of Beat Kammerlander's masterpiece, Silbergeier (six pitches, 8b+) on the Fourth Kirchlispitze in the Ratikon, Switzerland. At much the same time Berger completed the first free ascent of an old sportingly bolted project, Antihydral (six pitches, 8b), on the wall just to its left. But three-time World Cup ice champion Hari Berger was killed on December 20 while ice climbing near his home in Salzburg.*

*Karambony, north face, Always the Sun, second ascent; Tsaranoro Be, Gondwanaland, rebolting; various other ascents.* The Tsaranoro massif offers world-class free big-wall routes from 5.9 to 5.13, in a country that is one of the planet's poorest, yet is full of the happiest, warmest people we have ever met. In September our group, comprising Anne and John Arran, Giles Cornah, Jerry Gore, and Gaz Parry made a visit. On our first day in Andringitra National Park we all climbed Out of Africa (580m, 7a). This proved a tough intro, with 14 pitches of superb granite slabs offering the best flakes, chickenheads, and big-crystal climbing any of us had ever experienced. Not to be missed if you are a 5.11 climber.

Next up was the British extreme, Always the Sun. Put up in 1999 by Grant Farquar, Steve Meyers, Louise Thomas, and Twid Turner, it offers eight pitches up to 7c+ on a 400m smooth granite face with "better-than-gritstone" friction. An "on-form" Gaz onsighted all the hard pitches, commenting, "Imagine climbing a 7c+ route with no handholds!" A typical day of climbing would involve 10+ pitches and leave our arms strong, our skin in tatters, and our feet on fire. Footwork is the key in Tsaranoro. With the team accustomed to the rock, we picked off the hot ticks. Gaz and John made an onsight ascent of Rain Boto (420m, 10 pitches, 7b+). The entire team made an ascent of Le Crabe aux Pincés d'Or (320m, 11 pitches, 7b+), with both Gaz and John onsighting the crux pitches. Gaz and John made an ascent of Bravo Les Filles (600m, 15 pitches, 8b). However, they were unable to free the crux, a boulder-problem pitch that is very hard and out of character with the rest of the route. With a bit of cleaning and a slight change in line, this pitch might go free at around 7c/7c+, and in John's opinion be much better for it.

Gondwanaland (800m, 7c, 7a+ obl) is one of the massif's longest, most demanding routes, a true directissima up Tsaranoro Be, the biggest wall in the area. Cited as one of the hardest big-wall routes in Africa, it offers 20 pitches up to 7c, including a killer midsection comprising eight continuous pitches of 7a/7b on expanding flakes with numerous runouts up to 10m between bolts. The climb, put up in 1997 by Botte, Cola, Egger, Gargitter, Obrist, Trendwalker, and Zanesco, uses hand-drilled 6mm and 8mm steel bolts that are now rusty. Recently it has been thought of as a chop route, and even Leo Houlding decided against it when he visited in 2003.

Gondwanaland was Jerry's primary motivation for climbing in Madagascar, and he persuaded us others that it was ours too. We climbed the route, rebolting every belay but replacing only the handful of protection bolts we didn't trust. We thus effectively "reopened" this amazing line, without adding bolts or otherwise changing the route. Over five days Jerry went up with various partners and rebolted the first 10 pitches with 10mm stainless (now *de rigueur* in the Tsaranoro massif, because the area is subject to continuous rainfall during the rainy season, which starts at the end of October). We got gear and rope established up to the grassland bivouac ledge at half-height.

In two teams, each taking two days, we climbed the entire route. Gaz, Giles, and Jerry climbed as a threesome, rebolting the upper section as we went (again, only belays and the occasional protection bolt), followed by John and Anne, who shared leads, climbing every pitch on sight or redpoint. The route is now physically and psychologically safer. The belays will not fail, and most of the unreplaced bolts are quite adequate. (They improve the higher you climb; one or two of the original protection bolts low on the wall may still be dubious.) Gondwanaland felt like the Bachar-Yerian on Medlicott, but five times as long.

Runouts up to 10m are one aspect of the Tsaranoro that makes the climbing committing, exciting and, despite bolt protection, more akin to trad than sport climbing. It is essential to have good edging boots that are both comfortable and good on "holdless" pitches, where there is a continual emphasis on the feet. Forget wires, Friends, and pitons, this place is all about friction slabs, crystal-pinching, and expanding flakes: "braile" climbing.

The last week of the trip was centered around Diego Suarez, party capital of Madagascar. Wild dance action with beautiful Malgash girls, sea-view accommodation, and amazing spear-fish food were all in plentiful supply. We also reveled in the high-quality single-pitch routes at the northern tip of Madagascar, on the mainland at Montagne Des Francais and on the tiny islands of Nosy Anjombalova and Nosy Andantsara. The most notable achievements included John's flash ascent of the second hardest route on the islands, Tafo Masina (8a, the route's fourth ascent) and Gaz's ascent (first redpoint) of Madagascar's hardest route Les Nuafrages Du Rhum (8b+). Gaz's successful send of Les Nuafrages on the last day, as the sun's fireball dropped into the ocean, was the perfect end to the perfect climbing trip.

The person to contact when planning a visit to the Tsaranoro Massif, and to arrange accommodation in the park, is Gilles Gauthier (Gondwana Explorer, B.P. 5133, 101 Antananarivo, Madagascar, madamax@madamax.com or bourdon-to@wanadoo.mg).

To climb on the islands at the northern tip of Madagascar, contact Mathieu and Trina (Newsea Roc Madagascar, Agence spécialisée dans le sport d'aventure, Gestion de Camps d'Escalade, 26 rue Colbert BP 541, Diego Suarez, Madagascar, www.newsearoc.com).

JERRY GORE, FRANCE, and JOHN ARRAN, U.K.

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