

Finally, we took the main highway via Wadi Hawasinah to investigate the alluring east face of Jabal Nakhus, first climbed in January 2009 by Ian Gough and Joe Sambataro. Wary of the numerous off-width corners, we took a narrower crack line up the center of the main face. This provided solid, well-protected climbing, but the sharp rock bloodied our hands mercilessly. We continued to the ridge to complete Hand Grater (338m of climbing, VI or British HVS 5a+) and descended by rappel close to the Gough-Sambataro descent. Although the local villagers seemed concerned about our antics, the inaccessible summit ridge featured a pair of large, expertly constructed cairns.

After this, we took a much-needed soak in the Nakhl hot springs before returning to Muscat. In contrast to my previous visits, the weather on this trip was persistently cool with frequent afternoon clouds. Otherwise nothing had changed: the people remain as hospitable as ever, and we saw no other visitors except at well-known attractions.

PAUL KNOTT, *New Zealand*

Yemen

Socotra Island, Mashanig Towers. Several years ago I explored the eastern islands off the coast of Papua New Guinea, looking for steep rock formations that had yet to see humans on their summits. I found amazing spires. There I met an ornithologist who was also following his passion. I gave him my contact and asked that if he ever saw big, steep walls or towers on his travels, could he please send details. A year later he sent me information about Socotra Island off the coast of Yemen, saying there were big rocks in the mountains. That was enough for me; I had to go. There was little information about these mountains; this was perfect. I first planned



Twin towers of Mashanig, Yemen, looking from southwest: Daddy and Daughter. Rock bridge is visible in notch.
Mike Libeck

to go solo, but the political situation became intense, especially for Americans. I invited Josh Helling, one of my best friends and the best climber and partner I know. Political mayhem pointed to not going, but after he digested all the information, Josh decided to join me.

Our trip lasted from November 17 to December 17. We flew Utah-Germany-Ethiopia-Sana'a (the capital of Yemen). We didn't leave the Sana'a airport, as it was safer to fly straight to Socotra. The island is remote and little known, and it is likely we were the first climbers to visit. We arrived in the rainy season, but it was manageable. Locals were most helpful. We toured the island and hiked many miles to reconnoiter climbing potential. We had set our eyes on the highest part of the island and the two most prominent rock towers: Mashanig and its neighbor. I called them the Daddy and Daughter. We shuttled loads to a perfect base camp, with a nearby stream, and climbed routes on both towers.

At the base of the Daughter a spire, as big as a whale, had fallen between the towers to make a magnificent bridge, like a plank off a pirates' ship. We walked this plank and started our route right off the bridge, wonderful and exotic. Encased in clouds and rain, we spent one day climbing the north face on the time-bomb-slippery, lichen-painted rock, before reaching the summit in a white-out. From the pirates' plank bridge to the was just over 600' and 5.10.

Weather on the towers was unique. In the notch between the two there was wind, clouds, and rain 24 hours a day, and for our entire time on the Daughter we endured moisture mayhem. On the Daddy we started on the east face, and the tower became our shield. As we climbed, wind and clouds raced by, leaving us in a sanctuary from this torment. We reached a ledge just below the summit and bivouacked there, having enjoyed beautiful free-climbing in lichen-and moss-caked cracks. Next day we stood on the summit, above the clouds and rain. It was powerful and magical, to say the least, and we naturally put on our Year of the Ox masks and celebrated. The 800' route was also 5.10. We drilled no holes on either route and left only slings for rappel anchors.

We are going back to this island, because there is another mystery. Someone had been to the spires before, as on top of the Daddy, and also on a ledge beneath the summit, we found stacked rocks similar to those that locals would pile at gravesites. They were caked with lichen that formed a shell around the structure and had obviously formed after the rocks were stacked. A Yemeni botanist thinks these rocks were stacked at least 80-100 years ago and that a local may have found a way to the top of the spires for religious or magical reasons, or maybe to pass on to his next life. We hope to know more after our next trip. There may have been an easier route to the summit than the one we took, but we had a good look around. On any route up the tower an unroped fall would be fatal.



Mike Libecki on first ascent of Mashanig Daughter.
Josh Helling