

three days, December 4-6, to complete our route, which we named Akuna Mata-ta (320m, 7b). The route is bolted, but a good selection of cams and micro-Friends is essential. We were pleased with the rock throughout, and the quality of climbing. It's an elegant line with a high degree of exposure; we couldn't have asked for anything more.

ALBERTO ZUCCHETTI, *Italy*

## NAMIBIA

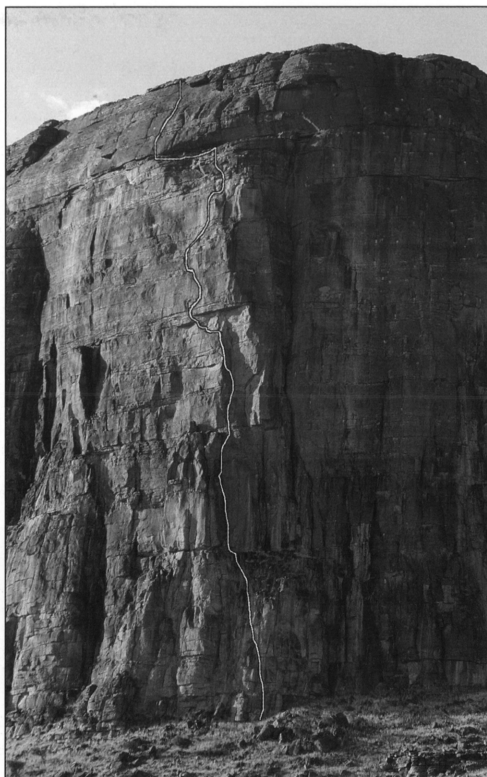
*Brandberg, Southern Crossing.* Bushes, bird excrement, snake paranoia, exfoliating faces, incipient seams—all to get to one perfect crack climb. Throughout May, Peter Doucette, Kate Rutherford, and I explored Namibia. Chris Alstrin and Gabe Rogel joined us to document the trip. At the end, on our last possible climbing day, we completed a first ascent of Southern Crossing, a V 5.11+ (South Africa grade 26) on the Orabeskopf Face of Brandberg, Namibia's highest mountain. It took seven days of work to find the line, clean it, and do a one-day ascent.

Namibia is not known for its climbing, which is why I wanted to visit. Better known as Africa's newest independent country, Namibia is the continent's largest source of uranium and diamonds and the locale of the Namib Desert, the Skeleton Coast, and tribal peoples. In the middle of the country lies Spitzkoppe, with over 80 established climbs. When I heard about it, I wondered where else in Namibia it might be possible to climb.

War, apartheid, and remoteness have combined to discourage exploration of many of Namibia's vertical landscapes. When I saw an out-of-focus photo of a 2,000' granite prow, with a mud Himba hut in the foreground, I knew I'd found my objective. The Himba are southern Africa's largest pastoral tribal group and have maintained their distinct cultural identity despite being on the borderline of battle, resources, and landscape. I wanted both things I saw in that photo: the culture and the climbing.

First we visited Spitzkoppe, an 1,800' granite dome with slab climbs reminiscent of Joshua Tree. We climbed there, then moved north, driving five long days on dirt roads to reach the Marienfluss Valley and the granite prow. It took only 15 minutes to realize that our 2,000' objective would be unwise. We were now 18 days into our expedition. We turned to the Himba instead and learned that a 200' 5.7 was just as valid as a 2,000' 5.12 when it comes to cultural connection.

We drove south. Plan C was a trip to the Brandberg and a granite face called the Orabeskopf: 1,500' of pure rock to a 7,200' summit. It is steep, riddled with cracks, and in the shade



Akuna Mata-ta on northeast face of Mata. *Alberto Zucchetti*

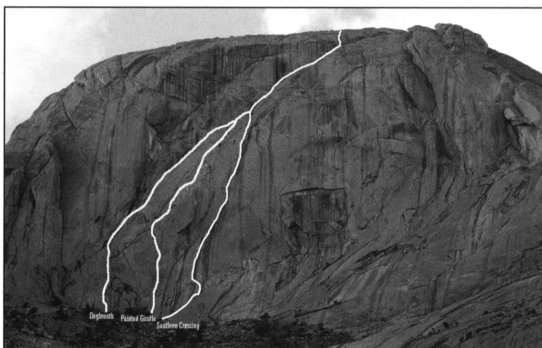
all day. The face had been climbed once, in 1974 by R. Blumgart and R. Lichman, who ascended the long, central chimney system. Since then, its remoteness has largely kept it off climbers' radar.

We started by trying to repeat the 1974 route but accidentally made a first ascent: Painted Giraffe (5.9, SA 18). We returned with six days' food, a triple set of cams and nuts, twelve bolts, seven hangers, a hand drill, and a single set of pins. We had one week before we were flying back across the Atlantic.

During our first day on the climb, Peter and I went all of 200', while Kate remained tent-bound after inhaling too much bird excrement the previous day, after a thwarted attempt on another line. It took two hours to navigate a 30'-high loose block that threatened to keep us from ever climbing a second pitch. And then there were the bushes. Peter and I quickly developed a routine of finding a stance with feet and one hand, using the other hand to attack foliage, sometimes with a nut tool. We had one goal those first two days: to make it to the brilliant orange and green corner above.

Climbers are generally seen as stewards of the land. But we had to clean these cracks heavily. We contemplated this every day. Would this be justified for any climb? I would say no. But this climb mattered, it was personal, and it was shaping into a phenomenal climb—a climb I

knew would be repeated. This final element sealed our decision (and installed a corollary sense of responsibility to do an even better job cleaning). Peter and I fought those precious 70m for a total of eight hours in two days, progress directly proportional to one's tolerance for ingesting bird excrement and dirt. Each night we come back to camp by headlamp, on the way filling our water containers at a small hole, so that we carried up to 18 liters each trip.



Orabeskopf face at Brandberg. From left to right: Dogbreath (5.5-5.8, Blumgart-Lichman, December 1974), Painted Giraffe (V 5.9, Burhardt-Doucette-Rutherford, May 2009), Southern Crossing (V 5.11+, Burhardt-Doucette-Rutherford, May-June 2009). *Majka Burhardt*



Majka Burhardt on pitch six of Herero Arch, Spitzkoppe, (5.12 A0, SA 26 A0). *Gabe Rogel*

I didn't expect to find great climbing in Namibia; I expected a brief stint of good climbing, followed by a long search for passable climbing. I'd gone to Africa before to merge climbing and culture, in Ethiopia and South Africa, and kept my climbing expectations low and my life-broadening hopes high. I'd told myself that utter climbing success might be impossible. I didn't say it out loud, thankfully, because if I had, we might not have found Orabeskopf. We might not have found a climb that was better than passable, maybe even great.

On June 1 we woke before dawn, placed our homemade grass brush in our backpack, filled our water bottles, and hiked for the last time across talus and grassy slopes filled with puffed adders, horned adders, and spitting cobras. We racked up and climbed 13 pitches to the top. I sunk my hands into freshly cleaned cracks, their grit pressing into my flesh. I brushed, blew, and kicked dirt off footholds—dirt we'd dropped there from our efforts in the crack above. We chimneyed, offwidthed, jammed, laybacked, and stemmed to the top of Southern Crossing, V 5.11+. It's climbing I would travel anywhere to do.

The ascent is chronicled in the documentary *Waypoint Namibia* by Alstrin Films. Get culture and insight into why Namibia might be the new model for African conservation at [www.waypointnamibia.com](http://www.waypointnamibia.com). [Portions of this story were previously published in the 2010 Petzl catalogue: [www.petzl.com](http://www.petzl.com).]

MAJKA BURHARDT, AAC

## MALAWI

### MULANJE MASSIF

*Chambe, west face, Nkhalango Khoswe; lower Eastwood-Howell Route, first free ascent.* Situated south of Tanzania and west of Mozambique, Malawi is a small country in southern Africa best known for its lake of the same name. A year ago Jeremy Roop and I had stumbled across a website describing a half-mile-long, 5,500' wall on the west face of Chambe, one of many peaks comprising the Mulanje Massif (9,850'). The wall was described as being broken after 2,000' by a large, broad jungle terrace, above which was an additional 3,500' wall. After reading the 1988 Frank Eastwood guidebook and firsthand accounts by two South African climbers, Alard Hufner and Mark Seuring, who had climbed on the west face in 1997, we decided it warranted further exploration. We found accounts of only two routes on the lower face and two on the upper face, three of which were pioneered by Eastwood in the late 1970s. We felt sure that we could find a new route to the top, preferably to the left of the Eastwood Route on the upper wall.

After arriving in Lilongwe, we began the hectic process of shuttling gear south through Blantyre to Likhubula, a town at the base of the Mulanje Massif. While in Blantyre, we chanced to meet Maggie O'Toole, Chairperson of the Malawi Mountain Club, who provided additional information about the Mulanje Massif. Five days after leaving the U.S. in late September, we arrived at a small Scottish mission (the CCAP House) in Likhubula, where we camped for a nominal fee. Heeding Maggie's recommendation, we hired a local guide for the first day of our approach to the lower west face of Chambe (called the Approach Slabs in the guidebook) and the start of the 1977 Eastwood-Howell Route. This turned out to be an excellent decision, as