

days, as it happened to be Madagascar's wine capitol.

After stocking up on wine (\$1 a bottle at most), we headed toward Mt. Tsaranoro. On the way in, we stopped for a couple of weeks at some nice domes about 11 miles north of Tsaranoro. Here we completed two nice first ascents on unnamed formations: *The Eyes of the Owl* (5.11+, 700'), and *Devil's Dust* (5.9 A1, 1,200'). The free climbing was fun, but we really wanted to do some awesome longer routes near the amazing Tsaranoro.

About this time, Misako Koyonagi, one of Japan's top women climbers, arrived to meet us, and we proceeded to complete some top-notch new routes. First we made the first ascent of the northeast face of Mt. Karambony, a huge tombstone-like formation to the right of Tsaranoro, with the route *Sakai Wall* (VI 5.10 A3+, 1,400'). (Sakai is a Madagascar special hot sauce.) This route contained one of the best pitches I never imagined, a 190-foot pitch of knifeblades, beaks, rurs, heads and spice. After the pitch was fixed, it was so steep you had to lower out 100-plus feet to jug up. The three of us also completed *The Zoze Wall* (VI 5.10 A3+, 1,800') on the right side of Tsaranoro (Zoze is the name of a local who became our friend, mostly because of our pancakes and coffee). This route offered a variety of beautiful climbing from vertical chimneys and hard face climbing to splitter finger cracks. Jim and I ended our climbing venture with an attempt of *Norspace* (5.11c/d), which goes almost up the center of Tsaranoro. We bailed just a few pitches from the top, as my fingers were close to igniting (Jim didn't want to hear me cry anymore) after having enjoyed its best pitches.

Our same guide who showed up to take us back to the airport several hundred miles to the north had us stop by his house. No wonder he had a brand new, totally loaded 4 x 4 safari vehicle (the nicest vehicle we saw the whole time on the island). He was Madagascar royalty with a mansion, servants, guards, 400 rose bushes, a prize-winning garden, silver and gold attire for his home, feather beds, you name it. We even drank 15-year-old bottles of French Bourdeaux with our lobsters. Never did ask how he got his money.

MIKE LIBECKI\*

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*Tsaranoro Atsimo, Southeast Spur, Life in a Fairy Tale.* In September, Mark Wilford, Silvia and Craig Luebben and non-climbers Lane Ahern and Dhasa Bishop traveled to the Tsaranoro Massif in southern Madagascar. The climbers ascended three classic Tsaranoro routes, including the fabulous 1,800-foot *Out of Africa* (6c+). Unfortunately, Mark had to leave after only two weeks, but the Luebbens stayed and began equipping a new 1,600-foot route up the Massif's southeast skyline, drilling bolts on lead. Though they carried a large rack, they found placements for only three stoppers on the entire route. Most of the pitches were long, often requiring the full length of their 200-foot lead rope.

Using a Bosch drill with a solar panel to recharge their batteries, the two drilled more than 140 bolts in seven days, using fixed ropes to regain their high point each day. Though some claim there can be no adventure with so many bolts on a route, putting up the route turned out to be quite an adventure. Each placement was drilled from sketchy stances or hook placements, which is extremely strenuous work, and 30-foot falls were often possible with the drill in hand. Plus, there was constant doubt that the pitches above would go. The lack of crack systems in the Tsaranoro has forced almost all the free routes to require many bolts.

While camped at the base of the wall, the group was serenaded by drums and chants from the tribes in the valley below and lemurs in the surrounding forests. After the route was

drilled, they took a reprieve, visiting nearby rain forests and the powerful Indian Ocean. Then they returned, hoping to free climb the route, with only one day remaining before their departure. The climb, which they named *Life in a Fairy Tale* for their surreal experience in the beautiful valley, turned out to be very continuous, with seven pitches out of ten being 5.11+ in difficulty (later verified by a British team that made the second ascent). The route was mostly fun and thoughtful slab climbing, with a few bulges to keep the climbers honest. The Luebbens freeclimbed their route to the top, then cleared their fixed ropes and headed home. In a touching moment, as they left the Massif, the villagers they had camped beside early in the trip came out to say goodbye.

CRAIG LUEBBEN

## COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES (C.I.S.)

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### RUSSIA

#### CAUCASUS

*Kiukiurtliu, Northwest Face, Lukashvilly Route.* From August 21-27, a team of the Moscow Mountaineering Federation led by Alexander Abramov and comprising N. Vlasov, L. Dorfman, O. Milenin and I. Turchaninov climbed the 1981 Lukashvilly Route on the northwest face of Kiukiurtliu (4639m). Kiukiurtliu is situated in the Elbrus group; the ascent is one of the most difficult routes of the Caucasus. The team climbed during bad weather with a lot of snowfall, fog and cold. The route goes along the left part of the headwall on completely vertical terrain. The rock face is about 1000 meters high with a very steep average incline. The problem of this face is that the rock is not very hard and in order to make good belay points it is necessary to use long, specially-made pitons of 15 or even 20 centimeters.

The same team had tried to climb a new route on the face in December, 1999, but the weather conditions were very terrible. The team spent more than a week waiting for better weather, but received only deep snow and fog.

VLADIMIR SHATAEV, *Russian Mountaineering Federation*

*Mt. Western Doppah, Northeast Face/Northeast Ridge.* From July 21-27, a team from the Moscow mountain club Strannik ("pilgrim") comprised of V. Zadokhin, leader; V. Doolnev, M. Borschev, V. Polivko, A. Filipov and P. Yatsenko established a new route via the right part of the northeast face/northeast ridge of Mt. Western Doppah (4389m). The route goes along the right-hand side of the 600-meter buttress, where the climbers encountered a lot of small waterfalls and wet rock. Mt. Western Doppah is in the Digoria region; it is part of the Suganskiy range of the Central Caucasus and is part of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic (the Besengi region is to the west). The area has not been visited much in the last ten years.

VLADIMIR SHATAEV, *Russian Mountaineering Federation*