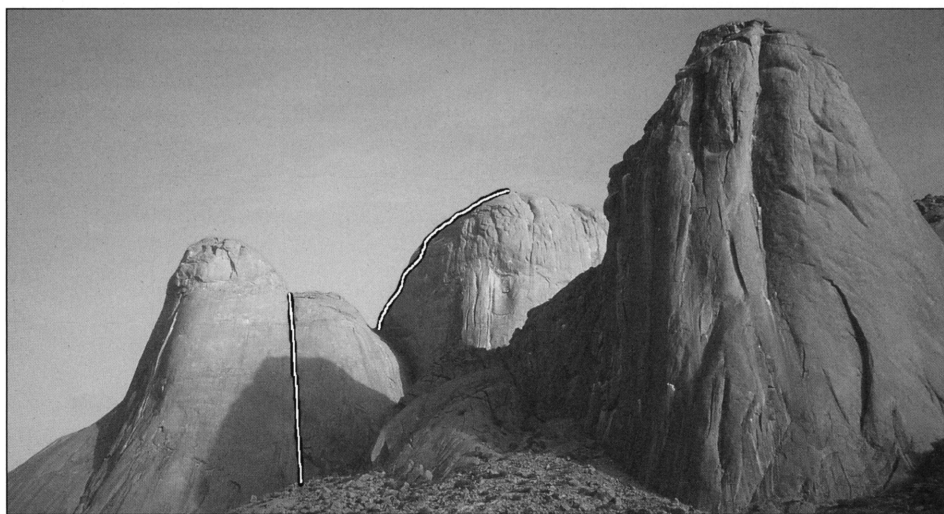


Africa

SUDAN

Kassala area, various new routes. Lost in the Sudanese East, only a few kilometers from the border with Eritrea, a small island of a dozen granitic monoliths dominate the town of Kassala. Baboons and vultures live there. French climbers Matthieu Noury and I returned from this incredible area enchanted by the country and by the local African tribes we met (Rashaiba, Haddendowah, and Beni Amir), and the routes we opened. Only two known routes existed before our arrival. The first, opened in 1939 by L.W. Brown and R.A. Hodgkin, was described by its first ascenders as the most beautiful climbing in Africa. It allowed them to gain *Jebel Taka*, the highest point of the granite domes (approximately 1,500m). Two pitons are still in place in a splendid 5+ (5.9) dihedral. The first repetitions took place in November 1981 by a Czech team, and in December 1983 by Tony Howard (U.K.). The second route is near the village of Totil, on one of the additional Turns of *Jebel Totil*, and was probably climbed by the Czech team in 1981. It offers constant athletic crack climbing at ED-, 6c.

In addition to the free repetitions of these two routes, Matthieu and I opened three new routes during our stay: Mohammed et Mustapha au Pays des Enfants (120m, TD, 6b), with aesthetic crack climbing located above village huts. *Chaud Crâne* (250m, TD+, 6b) is a broad system



Domes of *Jebel Kassala*. The lower 300m line is *Khawadja* on north *Taka*. The upper line is the 200m Brown-Hodgkin route on *Taka* summit. The obvious 250m dihedral on the big dome (west *Taka*) has not been climbed, probably because there are no cracks leading to it. According to Jonglez, it should be a "fantastic hand crack." David Jonglez

of cracks leading to the southern shoulder of Jebel Taka. Khawadja (means “white man”) (300m, TD+, 6b+) climbs a rectilinear crack between two immense smooth and compact flagstones. This crack offers exceptional climbing on carved rock. It is a beautiful route that leads near the top of Jebel Taka.

The climbing area and its neighbors seem to conceal great potential for climbing. The immediate border of Kassala (from north to south, Mucram, Totil, and Taka) consist of 12 principal towers ranging from 100m to 450m, and many other domes from 50m to 100m. Nevertheless, the compactness of the rock offers only rare lines for natural protection. Some faces seem to await generations of climbers to come, as they are stiff and smooth.

DAVID JONGLEZ, *France*

Editor's note: A comprehensive article on desert climbing in “North Africa and the Middle East,” including the Kassala area (above) and Oman and Sinai (below), can be found in the AAJ 1999.

MIDDLE EAST

OMAN

Western Hajar mountains report. There has been another bout of new route activity since my last report in AAJ 2001. In November, possibly the best line in the range was climbed on Jabal Misht by resident guide Jacob Oberhause (Austria) and Brian Davison (U.K.). The direct line up the crest of the south pillar had been much talked about. The guys stormed the 1,200m route in a day at ED3 (5.11+) and named their line “The English Arête.” An interesting and possibly frightening development during the winter of 2001-02 was the arrival of the highly prolific Austrian team of Albert Precht and Sigi Brachmayer. This pair have dominated new route developments in Jordan's Wadi Rum over recent years and have now turned their attentions to the cream of Arabian limestone, all at the invitation of Oswald Oelz.

Oswald and Albert were part of a team attempting Makalu 25 years ago. Since then Albert has declined high altitude mountaineering in favor of his exploratory alpine and subalpine rock climbing. Oswald, though, went on to climb many Himalayan peaks, sometimes with Reinhold Messner. This invitation was designed to be a reunion as well as to ensure that this pair of mountaineering gentlemen summited a big piece of rock together after all this time. A nice touch.

The eastern wall of Jabal Misht, known as the Al Jil wall, had received an ascent courtesy of this author and David Barlow in 2000, but our route avoided the obvious difficulties of the central pillar. After an exploratory ascent of a line called Half Moon Corner with Gerhard Hafner, the Precht, Brachmayer, and Oelz team climbed the central pillar and named it in Oswald's honor as the Doc.Bulle pillar (500m, TD).

The Precht-Brachmayer team then took to the southwest face of Misht to climb the left edge of the wall. Watergate (500m, TD), takes the obvious corner system with the difficulties predominantly in the lower half. Not satisfied with this new route, the Austrians swung around the back and climbed a 200m new route on the north face of the First Tower at TD, just to fill in the rest of the afternoon!

In March 2003, Geoff Hornby with Mark Turnbull and Susie Sammut climbed the face right of Watergate to finish up the front face on the upper pillar. Sorely Misht is 600m, D sup.