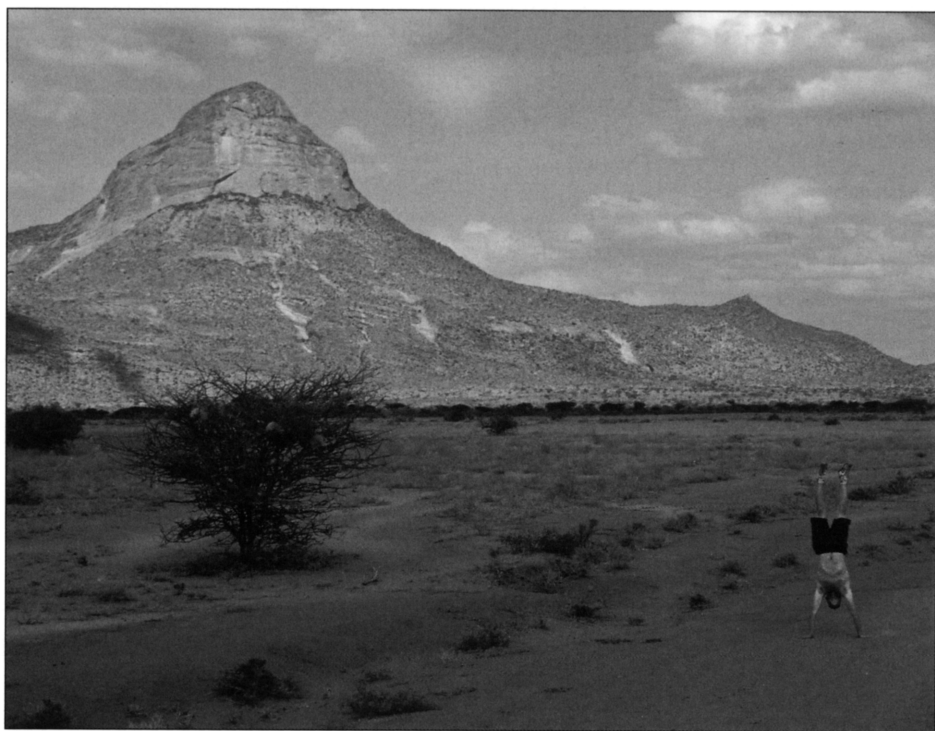


KENYA'S ROCKS

Welcome to the remote crags of Kenya, where adventure rules.

ALEX FIKSMAN



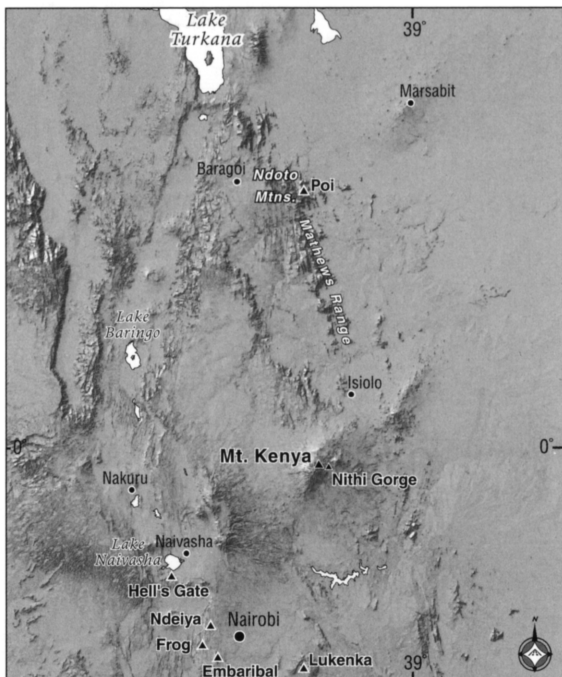
An unclimbed cliff in the desert just outside of the Ndoto Mountains. It has been called the Shark Fin, but this may not be the local name. *Felix Berg*

It's easy to fall in love with Kenya, a country as diverse in landscapes as in cultures. The contrasts come at every turn, from suited businessmen in chauffeur-driven mabenzis (Swahili slang for posh German class-distinguisher on wheels) to farmers living off their land, cattle, and goats as they have from the beginning of time; from glacier-studded Mt. Kenya to bush climbing on remote gneiss outcrops; from medium-wall adventure climbing to short classics frequented by the small Nairobi-based climbing community. Not many places in the world remain as wild as Kenya's crags, where you could walk past a herd of zebra on your way to the climb and the only thing that keeps you from your long-awaited reunion with a cold Tusker (exceptional Kenyan beer) might be an irritated 1,000-pound Cape buffalo.

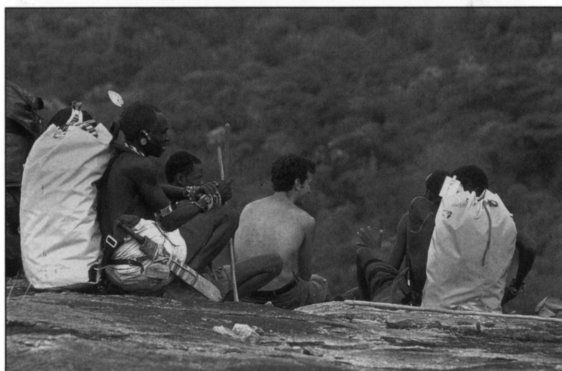
Kenyan climbing entered the modern age in the 1970s when the strong British Ian Howell came to work in Kenya and found a 16-year-old Iain Allan showing great promise and enthusiasm. The routes they established were world class, and it was the Ia(i)ns who most explored the region's vast rock potential during nearly four decades.

Today, many of the gneiss domes jutting from semi-arid plains have seen varying degrees of development, but so much more remains to be done. Ololokwe, for example, is a two-kilometer-long cliff standing 400 meters high. Located about five hours' drive out of Nairobi, it has only a few established routes—enormous potential remains for hard sport routes and possibly some thin crack climbs. The vast quantity of rock around the country (there are about a dozen noteworthy cliffs with only the most obvious lines explored), combined with the small number of local climbers, translates into superb possibilities for new route potential, second ascents, and removal of aid on existing climbs. It should be mentioned that the Mountain Club of Kenya (www.mck.or.ke) has developed a clear bolting policy (which includes a moratorium on bolts in national parks); the club can also be a big help with suggestions on logistics for climbing in outlying areas as well as finding climbing partners.

In the pages that follow, we decided to focus on three climbing areas that have received noteworthy development in the last couple of years: the 250-meter cliffs in the Nithi Gorge on the eastern approach on Mt. Kenya; the Ndoto Mountains in the Northern Frontier District, home to the longest sport route in Africa on the recently famed Poi cliff; and the Main Wall of Hell's Gate in the Rift Valley, 1.5 hours out of Nairobi—it was originally developed as the training ground for Nairobi climbers headed for Mt. Kenya and now stands in its own right awaiting the new generation of climbers.



Northern Kenya map by Martin Gamache, Alpine Mapping Guild



Samburu and Rendile warriors with Marnix Buonajuti (with the bouffant hairdo) about three hours into their hike toward Poi. Felix Berg