

Triennial Report 1971-3 Africa

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SOUTH AFRICA

The following note is based entirely on information supplied by Michael Scott which is acknowledged with appreciative thanks. With the large numbers of good climbing areas and the vast expanses of rock there are relatively few climbers. Consequently trends in any period of three years are hardly noticeable. The State, with a growing 'native consciousness' is declaring many mountain sites as 'Wilderness Areas' for conservation purposes and closing them to climbers except by permit. Most of the mountain land is owned either by the State or privately by farmers. The farmers in isolated areas at first welcomed the occasional climbers but now they are being plagued every week-end with trippers of all varieties and are much more dubious because of the resulting increase in the problems arising from fire risk and the destruction of fruit crops by dust from the hot gravel roads.

There are now few, if indeed any, unclimbed peaks so attention tends, as it were, to descend the mountaineering scale from the 'sublime' towards the 'ridiculous', and to be directed to mini-peaks or pinnacles. A spate of these has



been climbed in such places as Siva, the colourful Cedarberg and the rugged Hex River range. Except for the Drakensberg which is poor basalt, the rock generally is Table Mountain series sandstone and varies from very good indeed to incredibly bad. Two examples of good rock pinnacles in the Hex River area were climbed by Henri Snijders and Michael Scott in 1972, the Piccolo on Mount Superior (graded F1) and the Monolith on Mount Windsor (graded F3 and involving 400 m of exposed climbing).

The remote Karroo desert areas near the Orange river are, as the result of after-hours interest by a few keen UCT graduate students in geology in the first place, being explored and some interesting short routes have been climbed

86 *Unclimbed ironstone pillars, East Cape Province*



on colourful and grotesque sandstone and granite. Granite in South Africa is generally poor decaying stuff but there is a growing interest in the unusual style of climbing it yields. Typical of this is Marchant's climb on Paarl Rocks, christened Vietnam Crack as once you are involved it is difficult to get out again. In the Eastern Cape and Graaf Reinet area not much has been climbed but John Moss and Richard Ledger are discovering considerable scope for the kind of long clean routes which they have been opening up in little-explored gorges.

The majestic Toverkop near Ladismith, Cape, has probably seen more activity in the last three years than in the previous century. The summit dome of sheer quartzite, over 180 m high has yielded a number of high-quality routes after concerted sieges by climbers undaunted by the five hours slog up steep screes and kranzes to Nel's Cave, the camp site at 2070 m. Moss and party put up a hard (G) crack line, using aid in places, in the mistaken belief that they were on another climb. Two Austrian girls climbed Berrisford's route thinking they were doing the original Nefdt route, an understandable error as Berrisford opened his route in the mistaken belief that he was repeating Nefdt's route!

The Drakensberg range, where holding on to the grass is more trustworthy than holding on to the rock, has yielded some dramatic hard new routes to Tony Dick and Roger Fuggle with their bold and completely new outlook. Using bolts for protection in the poor basalt and sometimes abseiling from bolts to reach the start of the route, this Natal team put up a route on the N face of Giant's Castle. With a sideways blow at the looming problems of 'ethics', they took the unprecedented step of doing the bottom half of their route, then abseiling down from the top to the highest point they had so far reached and on a later afternoon doing the upper half to complete the climb. They thought these steps were justified, not fancying repeating the bottom half. In the event they graded both halves G2 and M2 and found the upper half even harder than the lower.

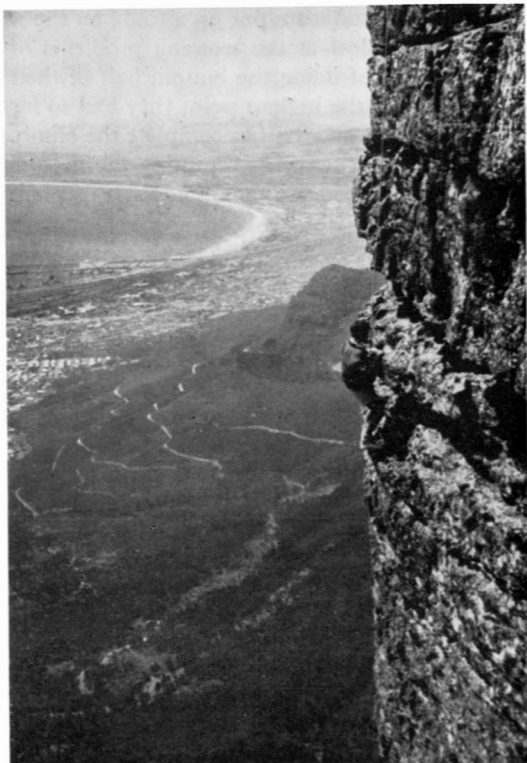
A feature of big wall climbing which has recently emerged is the practice of getting up and down in one day by abseiling instead of taking the traditional easy but roundabout walk back to base. Most routes have thus been done in one day. Several parties have experienced trouble with jammed ropes on the NW frontal on Du Toits Peak and at least one party had an enforced bivouac last season. To talk about abseiling in this way as a new idea may seem odd but the sandstone strata, particularly in the Cape, is so formed that most hard peaks have an easy walk off the back.

The biggest recent route in the Transvaal is Blouberg North Wall Direct, mentioned in last year's 'African Notes', by Paul Gatti and Art McGarr which involved new measures in 'psyching' up to effect a hard free G2 move in an incredibly exposed situation, and in the awkward pegging in shallow, dead grooves. Paul Gatti has been putting up a considerable number of hard new leads in the Transvaal and has made some holiday forays into the Cape where he has been responsible for two thirds of a route up a crumbling horror on Mount Brodie in the Hex River area, which presumably remains unfinished,

and which by common consent has been dubbed The Curate's Egg as it is most certainly only good in parts.

On the almost unbelievable vastness, orange and black, of the Duiwelskloof face in the Drackenstein mountains near Stellenbosch, Paul Fatti and Michael Scott climbed Berserker 1, 305 m of G2 and M1, the crux pitch of which is the only one recorded in South Africa that has not yet been managed by a single leader. This pitch was first climbed by the joint efforts of two leaders, neither having the strength to complete it in one lead. The first dozen metres have so far to be climbed by twice lassoing chockstones jammed in the crack and swarming up the rope.

The use of new equipment extends but slowly except among the relatively few 'gadget men', but once the potential of bat hooks/cliff hangers was realised climbers began to use them as emergency aids in the event of arm failure—rather like carrying a prusik loop in the pocket. Tim Hughes has been using them for new climbs like his fine new route on the Spitskop in SWA's vast desert region. On this granite eruption he chipped holes in the outer rotten layer, which rests on the good rock beneath like a peel, to place his bat hooks so as to surmount a smooth bulge interrupting a system of cracks. Extending this technique of bat hook climbing to the Transvaal he has opened up another good route on the smooth bulges of the Waterberg, near the Prow.



87 *Quickstep, Table Mountain*

In the Cape Province new routes continue to appear in unlikely places as climbers break the psychological barrier between a tentative attempt to make a climb and the real belief that a climb is there. So Paul Anderson and Brande Villiers have pushed through a dramatic route, wedge and bong-bong, around the massive roofs to the right of Roulette. With Richard Smitters, Anderson has finished off a bold free gymnastic climb around bulges on finger jugs on the wall below the once notorious Cableway Crag. This climb which had had to be abandoned by Fletcher and Hartley in pouring rain had never been completed. It was called Last Tango.

Henri Snijders and Michael Scott opened up Spectre, some 250 m of rock with only two short aid pitches, on the beautiful white wall to the right of Hallucination in the Banhoek Mountains at Stellenbosch. Scott also climbed a very direct route up the middle of the central turret of Castle rocks, with Anderson and Smithers, which was called Viaduct as the principal feature, breaking big overhangs crowning the top, is a natural water chute fortunately dry at the time. This was free climbing, F2 only at the crux.

A new twist has been given to the ever-present ethics 'battle'. Slope sloggers, in a spirit of one-upmanship are claiming fast times of ascent up peaks omitting all the minutes spent in resting on the way and taking only the actual walking time into account.

RHODESIA

In Rhodesia there remains plenty of scope for breaking new ground, one of the great joys of climbing. New routes are constantly being opened up in the established climbing areas and new areas are being discovered for exploration and first ascents. The last three years have been particularly fruitful and rock climbing seems to be going through a Golden Age with the advent of a crop of keen young climbers in the Mountain Club of Rhodesia backed by a hard core of older, more experienced types.

At the Hatfield Boulders, close to Salisbury, over 360 climbs have now been listed including, in an attempt at completeness, hundreds of new climbs of ten m or so. At least a dozen new routes have been pioneered in the adjacent Five Tier Boulder area and another six at the McIlwaine Boulders, another important Saturday afternoon climbing area. These boulders offer superb rock of all grades for practice climbing. A new rock with 20 to 25 m climbs has been discovered at Christon Bank and new routes up to about 100 m have been opened up at Swiswa and Musungwa. All these areas are close to the capital. The Rocky Mountains area, 40 miles from Salisbury, has exceeded all expectations and 22 climbs, several of which are graded 5, have been put up. As there are several traverses the route map looks something like a spider's web.

Following a reconnaissance by Messrs Sweet, Pyle and Choate the MCR held a meet at Murigabveni some 30 miles south of Bindura. Some fine new routes of about 140 m were made. On a farm owned by one of the Club members at

Inyanga there is a rock called The Sentinel which has no easy way to the top. Some of its challenging problems were overcome in 1972. In March of that year Tom Choate put up a new climb at Mazce Krantz as a partner to the classic Staghounds' Retreat. It was meant to be a Grade 3 climb but turned out to be a worthy and hair-raising Grade 5. He named it Staghounds at Bay. The MCR also held two successful meets at Lion's Head, south of Shamva. This rock uncannily resembles a lion couchant so when climbs are opened up they are named after the appropriate parts of that animal's anatomy such as Lion's Chin, and Lion's Rump. The 1973 meet yielded several high grade routes previously written off as unclimbable around the Head itself including the Ear. A steep crack under the Rump remains unclimbed. When accomplished, it will be hard now to select a name other than that most anatomically appropriate!

The MCR also had a meet at Mutiwaura, north of Mtoko, in late 1972. This is one of the highest rocks in Rhodesia. One of the hardest routes on Bari since the classic Baboon Route was pioneered by Rusty Baillie and Ian McMorrin was put up in November by Walter Krog and Tom Choate. This climb is a sustained Grade 5 with several Grade 6 moves. It was done the day following the latter's birthday and he accordingly christened it 'After Birth'. The highlight of 1973 at the time of writing was the camping and climbing meet at Lundi in the southern part of Rhodesia which had not been visited for some years. Here Tom Choate and Pat Sweet opened up on Gopora, two miles along the Hippo Pools road, what is perhaps the longest climb in Rhodesia. They nostalgically named it Buddha after the 6100 m peak in Nepal which they conquered together in 1971. The 410 m climb yields a spectacular view which was marred by light rain on this occasion. Compensation was found in a pub almost at the foot of the mountain! Among other new routes put up were Kid's Folly by Dennis Brown, Ian Cannel and Kate Woods (thought to be a first ascent, on Bangangwa, two miles N of the Rhino Hotel) and Hornflake by Walter Krog, Malcolm Tite, Bruce Campbell-Watt and Madeline Gunn (a first ascent of Dare, four miles along the Ngandu-Triangle road).

An exploratory meet at a mining area N of Salisbury called Mtoroshanga yielded a fine Grade 5 route led by Butch de Bruin, one of the MCR's coming tigers. Tom Choate, Keith Pyle and Madeline Gunn did a second ascent of Cannon Kopje by a new route. First climbed artificially by an Austrian party, this cannon shaped rock provides a sensational 40 m free abseil. In July 1973, 25 MCR members led by Tom Choate spent an exciting long week-end in the Matusadona Game Reserve after being transported across Lake Kariba and climbing the Sanyati Gorge. There followed three pleasant days of game viewing and hiking through open country. The pace of the party was accelerated somewhat at one stage by a charging rhino! In October 1971 Choate and Tom Cotton did the Grade 5 w face of Bari as a sponsored climb at so much a foot climbed to raise money for the Salvation Army.

(The whole of the above notes were sent by Walter Krog to whom grateful thanks.)

EAST AFRICA

The diverse, widely separated mountain groups of Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya and the Ruwenzori really do not lend themselves to a unified treatment. During the last three years there has been considerable activity on all three, emphasised by the publication of a revised guide-book—*Guide-book to Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro* by J. Mitchell (Mountain Club of Kenya, 1972) and a new one—*Guide to the Ruwenzori, the Mountains of the Moon* by H. A. Osmaston and D. Pasteur (Mountain Club of Uganda and West Col, 1972). These record all the very considerable developments.

On Mount Kenya in 1971 Ian Howell and Phil Snyder successfully climbed the Diamond Couloir as far as the Diamond glacier, leaving the glacier and the rest of the climb to the summit ridge to be completed. Two further attempts on the complete route by Howell and John Cleare were turned back by poor conditions in August and September 1972. The long-awaited first ascent was finally accomplished by Snyder with P. Thumbi, a ranger with the Mountain Park. Howell and John Temple made the first ascent of the Northern Slabs, a lengthy route which they graded V with A1 and described as excellent. Much of the local activity is due to Snyder, who is Assistant Warden of the National Park. In March 1973, with RAF leader Peter McGowan he climbed MacKinnon's Couloir, which runs up to the left of the E face route on Nelion. This climb of over 500 m is graded VI and was named after a member of an RAF visiting team, who fell to his death while abseiling down the ordinary route on Nelion. Another of Snyder's first ascents this year was the Diamond glacier route with Y. Laulan and B. Le Dain, which ascends the couloir between the Darwin glacier and the Diamond Couloir, is some 700 m long and is graded V. Iain Allan and Robin Harper climbed the Southern Slabs route which is graded VI. Howell and Harper made a second ascent of the North Chimney route and took the opportunity to remove the aid; they regraded it VI. Dennis Brown and Martin Briggs climbed the sw ridge of Batian and also the w ridge out of season. Snyder and Paul Anderson added a new direct start to the sw ridge, graded Vsup, which is now deemed one of the hardest and longest climbs on the mountain. Iain Allan and Mark Savage put up a new 200 m (Grade VI) route between the North Chimney route and the Firmin/Hicks route.

A new hut, the Austrian hut, has been constructed with the help of donations raised by Marcus Schmuck from the Österreichischer Alpenverein and other donors. It can accommodate 30 to 40 climbers and stands on the site of the former Arthur Firmin hut which was destroyed by fire. The technical training phase of developing a Kenyan mountain rescue team, organised by Fritz Moravec of the Hochgebirgsschule Glocknergruppe, was completed during 1972. Recently the construction of a téléphérique on Mount Kenya has been suggested; mountaineers look askance at any such proposal.

There has been considerable activity too on Kilimanjaro. In 1971 Howell and Snyder made a complete w-e traverse of Kibo and Mawenzi. In 1972 Frank Cannings, John Temple and John Cleare made a fast ascent of the Heim glacier, a route later repeated by Temple and Howell. These two also made an

ascent of the Penck glacier. Dave Knowles and Geoff Kempson made the first ascent of the North Spur on Mawenzi, a 700 m climb graded V to the left of the existing North face route. A Yugoslav party of sixteen climbers visited the mountain and two of them put up a new route on the 1200 m E face of Mawenzi's Hans Meyer Peak. The successful climbers were Tone Percic and Nejc Percic; the route is mainly grade IV with some pitches of V in the lower portion. The final 600 m appear to have taken three days with bivouacs in hammocks.

The W face of Mount Longido in N Tanzania was climbed in two days by Iain Allan and Mark Savage. Their route, called the West Diagonal, is about 700 m and is graded Vsup.

There has been a spate of exploratory rock climbing closer to the centres of population. Allan and Howell were prominent in developing steep and fierce routes at Hell's Gate, where a number of developments have taken place in recent months. Olympian was worked out by Allan, Harper, Howell and Snyder sharing leads. It is 200 m, HVS and A1. Allan and Howell have recently put up Zebra Wall (200 m, HVS and A2). These are now looked upon as probably the finest rock climbs in Kenya at the present time. Several major crags have had first climbs, including the ascent of the Great Crack at Goi by Howell and Chambers (305 m, HVS), and Kingdom Come and the Mandarin at Nzau. The last two, both by Howell and Allan, are 240 m and HVS. The same climbers also made a route called Giant (215 m VS) on Soitpus crag, which is 100 miles S of Nairobi.

(The above notes were supplied by R. Chambers, Iain Allan and H. A. Osma-ton; acknowledgement is also made to *Mountain*.)

NORTH AFRICA

Although they did not take place within the last three years it may not be amiss to recall some major expeditions in the Atlas Mountains of 1970. First the Spanish expedition of August in that year when, among other exploits, the party of fourteen climbers made several first ascents. These included the NE wall, the N wall and the NW ridge of Tiskin (3938 m.); the N face of the Lépiney Spur (3750 m) and the N face of the middle Spur of Tazahart (3874 m). Among several traverses that of the Tazahart massif was accomplished involving twelve summits between 3000 m and 4000 m. The highest mountain in the Atlas, Toubkal (4165 m) was climbed, the wreckage of a British cargo plane being found strewn near the summit. Somewhat earlier in the year, Hamish M. Brown with ten companions went to the Toubkal massif. They traversed Angour from W to E and the peaks of Iguenouane from which some members of the party made the 1525 m descent on skis. Other climbs included a new route on Toubkal—on the WNW arête, Afella and Tazahart, Jebel Oukaimeden, Imousser and Tibherine, Bou Ouzzal and several other summits. Toubkal itself was climbed several times and it was observed that among the plane

wreckage were high explosives and ammunition! Lac d'Infi was visited during a three-day visit to the s of the area and Iferouane traversed.

Hamish Brown, Tom Connor and others were in the Atlas in the spring of 1972. After a week's skiing for acclimatisation the party knocked off most of the major peaks available from the Neltner hut. Two members, Mills and Roberts, made what is believed to be the second ascent of the Great Ridge of Aksoul. They also made a double traverse of Anrhemer and climbed Ighil M'Goun, the only 4000 m peak outside the Toubkal massif. There were many other achievements and Hamish Brown speaks highly of the area: 'endless chances of hard new routes, lots of sunshine and the unfamiliar Arab world. Skiing is possible, and travel too. It is so accessible and, once there, extremely cheap (1970). Rock faces clear quickly of snow. A dozen peaks rise above 4000 m but routes can be over 1500 m on some of the bigger faces. It is hot . . . all these expeditions (1972) gave interesting experience in a country which remains as unspoilt as ever, and which gives a wonderful variety of sunny mountain activity.'

Also to be recalled is the French expedition to the Hoggar when a party led by Henri Agresti made some important new routes. Of particular note were those on Garet-el-Djenoun, the w face of which involved the use of 160 pitons and wedges, and on Tehoulag Sud where the Pâques Route on the w face only required 16 pitons!

In 1971 a French party found several new routes in Algeria including some made on Thaltatt and on Gougane. Another French expedition in the same year was in Niger, in the massif of L'Aïr which offers problems similar to those of the Hoggar. New routes of particular interest were made on the Aiguille de Temet, which it is believed had never previously been climbed and Taghe. There was also a British expedition to the Aïr mountains, a very full description of which appeared in the *Geographical Journal*, 1971. From the notes and reports received over the last several years, which are gratefully acknowledged, it is clear that this part of Africa holds its fascination for mountain voyagers and explorers. Dare one say it also seems to retain its air of strangeness, mystery and even, perhaps, romance?