



## AAC Publications

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### **Chameleon Massif, Chameleon Air Society**

Africa, Madagascar, Tsaranoro Valley

In February 2013, I was on my way to California after fishing during the winter on the Bering Sea, and I called my good friend Paul Byrne to bail on our spring trip to the Alaska Range. Luckily, during that same phone call, we agreed on a new objective and decided to head to the Tsaranoro Valley in the southern highlands of Madagascar. Our imaginations ran wild with the idea of climbing those big, black and yellow granite walls.

Two months later, I met up with Paul and we flew to Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, and journeyed the long road to the Tsaranoro Valley. The steep, clean, and beautiful walls were devoid of other climbers. The incredible rock formations are guarded by long bushwhacking approaches that are full of exciting wildlife. After climbing a handful of big, beautiful lines that rise out of various parts of the valley, and achieving our main objective, Out of Africa (580m, 7a) on Tsaranoro Kely, we turned our attention to the nearly virgin formation known as the Chameleon Massif. [Only one other route is known on this formation: Solothorn 4+ (290m, 7a). This route was established at least four years ago, reportedly by a Swiss team.] The Chameleon protrudes from the center of the valley like a baboon's tooth, and it has a rock formation on its summit that looks just like a chameleon lounging in the sun. It was our first time lead-bolting—a totally thrilling experience—and we both encountered challenges that tested our limits and abilities. It was an awesome blend of physical and mental strengths and creativity, and the solitary feeling of climbing a wall so far from home, with no other climbers around, certainly took our adventure to a higher level.

Every evening, we would rappel back to the ground after having our minds blown by an amazing day of climbing. After a brief recap of the day, we'd stash our gear at the base and enjoy the hour-long sunset walk through the villages and rice fields back toward our camp. Almost all the local villagers are incredibly kind, and love to exchange smiles and say "Salaam!" On the final day of our project, as I made my way up the last big pitch, passing three bulges on the upper headwall, I could feel the people of the valley below monitoring our progress. When I put the last bolt in, and moved through the final committing crux, the people in the fields erupted in celebratory hooting and howling. I will never forget that afternoon on top, chilling with one of my best friends in the world, sharing the psych and overlooking the bizarre landscape below.

That evening, as the big African sun sank below the horizon, we both had grins ear to ear as we rappelled our beautiful new 800' free climb. We named the route Chameleon Air Society. It took us three days to establish, and it goes at 5.11a. It's all on clean, highly featured, black granite. The crux pitches are phenomenal face climbing, and all the belays are equipped to rappel. The approach is easy in comparison to the other walls in Tsaranoro Valley. So, if you find yourself in Madagascar and you're psyched to send, bring two 60-meter lines, 14 quickdraws, six extendables, and please go get after this ridiculously fun climb!

Tyler Botzon, U.S.

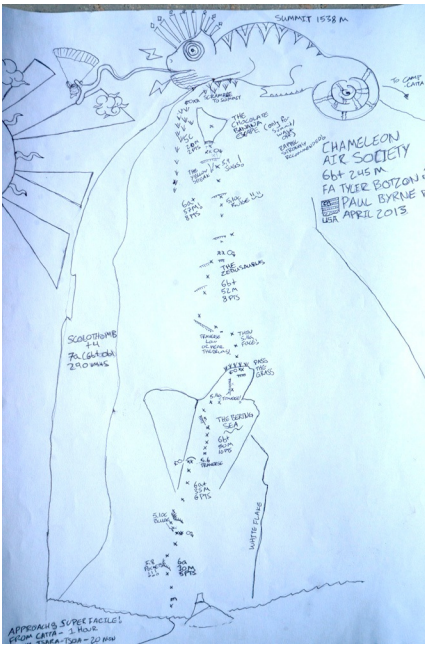
## Images



Tyler Botzon starting the "Bering Sea" pitch (third pitch) on Chameleon Air Society: "amazing sustained 5.11a face climbing for nearly 50 meters." In the background: Tsaranoro Be (center) and Karambony (right).



The Chameleon Massif. Left: Solothorn 4+ (290m, 7a). Right: Chameleon Air Society (245m, 5.11a).



Chameleon Air Society topo.



Tyler Botzon on Out Of Africa (580m, 7a), the trade route of the Tsaranoro Massif.

## Article Details

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