



AAC Publications

Jebel Kassala, The Rüppell Face

Africa, Sudan, Taka Mountains

On Sudan's eastern border with Eritrea lies an impressive collection of granite walls and domes called the Taka Mountains. Inspired by past reports from Tony Howard (AAJ 1999) and David Jonglez (AAJ 2003), and other vague rumors of climbing, my wife, Brittany Griffith, and I traveled to the area in December. We landed in Khartoum, then made the eight-hour drive to Kassala, population 450,000, which abuts the Taka Mountains. Since camping in an urban area was out of the question, we stayed in a guesthouse. The midday heat reached 100°F.

We spent two days hiking around the mountains and scoping options in the scorching heat. Baboons howled among the boulders, and vultures circled high above as we approached the walls. With the heat, north-facing walls were the most realistic option. Most of the crack systems were discontinuous, leaving large expanses of unprotectable face climbing, and we had only brought an emergency bolt kit, presenting an interesting challenge.

Eventually we found a line with promising cracks on the 900' north face on the farthest north formation. Our first attempt ended 600' up when Brittany wisely chose to turn back below a 90' section of unprotected face climbing on fragile flakes and edges. We returned the next day, reclinced the initial pitches, and I led the blank face, stopping to place a bolt from a tenuous, slabby stance. After that it was smooth sailing up straightforward cracks to the summit. We rapped off single-nut anchors as the Muslim call to prayer echoed from below. We named our route the Rüppell Face (900', 5.11c) in reference to the vultures and an obvious play on Nanga Parbat's Rupal Face. We also climbed two other fantastic 500' to 600' routes to different summits, but discovered bolts on one route and a haggard sling on the other. It's hard to know who may have climbed them first.

Jonathan Thesenga, USA

Images



Viewed from the west, the domes of Jebel Kassala, which comprise the Taka Mountains in Sudan. On the left is the Totil massif, showing (A) North Totil, (B) Jebel Totil, and (C) West Totil. The Ruppell Face ascends (A), climbing just inside the sun/shade line. Brittany Griffith and Jonathan Thesenga also climbed a 500' route up the center of (C), where they found two bolts protecting an offwidth. The route follows obvious dihedrals, which they climbed in the morning to avoid the sun. The bolt hangers were Petzl, so it was likely established by European climbers, and it's possibly the same route described by David Jonglez as the "Turns of Jebel Totil" (AAJ 2003). (D) Unnamed dome. On the right is the Taka massif, showing (E) North Taka, (F) Jebel Taka, and (G) West Taka. Thesenga and Griffith climbed a 600' route on the southeast (back) side of (G), where they found an old sling.



Herding communities inhabit the area below the Taka Mountains.



Brittany Griffith leading in the protection of the shade.



Brittany Griffith leading a steep crack as Ruppell's Vultures fly overhead.

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