



## AAC Publications

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### **Samburu Region, Mt. Ololokwe, 100 Percent Not Losing**

Africa, Kenya

**THE BEST BEER in Kenya is served at a place called Sabache Camp, about 30km north of the infamous dusty frontier town of Archer's Post.** The camp is tucked into a lush valley on the northeast flank of Mt. Ololokwe and serves up ice-cold (sometimes literally frozen) tall-boy Tuskers on 100°-plus days. It is the enchanting contrast of hellish, thorny, heat-stroke-inducing approaches and cold beer that I imagine brought Brittany Griffith, Kate Rutherford, and Jonathan Thesenga back to Mt. Ololokwe for a second year in a row in February 2017. That and their unfinished business with a new route on the striking and previously unclimbed 1,500' east face. With promises of even colder beer and hotter approaches this last year, they convinced me to leave perfect conditions for sport climbing in Siurana, Spain, to join them in finishing their new route.

Located in northern Kenya in the Samburu region, Ololokwe has been climbed via multiple technical routes, mostly on the ledge-filled and lower-angle terrain on the west side of the mountain. Alex Ficksman and Johannes Oos climbed the 1,400' south face at 5.10+ A2 in 2013 (see AAJ 2015). Brittany, Kate, and JT first attempted the east face in 2016, picking a line on the left side of the steep wall that attempted to avoid terrifying vulture nests and their accompanying 400' shit stains. The team's initial ground-up attempt faced major difficulties, as the wall had few continuous crack systems and steepened beyond anyone's expectations. After climbing two pitches and scouting more, the team decided to leave their gear in a hut at Sabache Camp and return the next year.

On February 4 we all convened at a rooftop bar on a bustling bright night in Nairobi to begin travel back to Sabache Camp, retrieve the gear, and continue work on the route. Intense drought could be felt more and more intensely as we travelled to the rural north. On my mind were the years of California drought that we had been "experiencing." Here, where the connection between environment and survival lacked the buffer of massive Sierra reservoirs and illusory endless tap water, herders walked livestock farther and farther for dwindling watering holes. It was a disturbing irony to see those with most likely the least contribution to global warming feeling the greatest effect because they relied so directly on the landscape.

We arrived at Sabache Camp to see workers attempting to repair the concrete water tank that had been destroyed the night before by a wild elephant. Luckily, the Tuskers were both delicious and hydrating, and we had stocked up on multiple cases before arriving. The difficult decision had been made to preview and establish our route on Ololokwe on rappel. Bolting on lead appeared to be an impossible task, due to the nature of the rock and unfortunate likelihood of drilling holes into dead ends. The swirling gneiss was like a mogul run tilted to dead vertical and covered in thin, potato chip patina. A few crack pitches served as major landmarks, but significant traversing meandered between them. (A greater adventure—and perhaps deadly histoplasmosis—awaits those who are willing to ground-up one of the dropping-stained crack systems farther right on the wall.

Following the footsteps of thirsty elephants up a well-trodden trail from Sabache Camp on the northeast side, we hiked to the summit, where we would camp for the next few days and set to work on the route. With limited time, we divided the wall into sections and each focused on our respective section, working out the exact path and where protection would be needed.

For roughly seven days we dangled around on the wall, usually hiding in a cave or under a boulder during the midday heat, when the sun would fire the rock like a kiln. JT and I focused on the lower half of the wall, while Brittany and Kate unlocked the upper half. The pitches turned out to be fantastic, varied, steep and technical.

Pitch one gains access to the wall from hummocks of blond grasses (5.9). Pitch two tackles a small roof (5.11c) to reach the blank, slabby dihedral of pitch three (5.10c). Pitch four (The Roof) launches 25' out into space, along a crack protected with a mix of gear and bolts (5.12d). The Red Dihedral of Pitch five comprises the crux of the route (5.13a) and has incredible steep, dynamic crimping interspersed with a bizarre technical dihedral and slopers. Pitch six climbs cave to cave along a black slab (5.11c). The next two traversing pitches weave through moguls and cacti (5.11c and 5.12a). The Eyebrow, which can be seen from the ground, features the best crack climbing of the route. The Lo-Brow (5.11+) and Hi-Brow (5.12b) place one beneath the final steep climbing of Kate's Pocket Pitch, an improbable bulge of smooth rock littered with deep incut pockets. Two easier but engaging pitches with crispy rock lead to the summit (5.10 and 5.11).

100 Percent Not Losing (1,300', 5.13a) had 13 pitches in all and requires a standard rack to number 3, 15 quickdraws, and extra runners. Each pitch was redpointed, with each individual contributing a critical lead to the team ascent, but in the end we were unable to complete a continuous free ascent. Climbing the route in a continuous push from the ground will be a proud and enjoyable experience that all the members of the FA team look forward to hearing about someday.

A big thank-you to Brittany, Kate, and JT for inviting me to tie in and follow them up their second year on the route.

– Eric Bissell, USA

## Images



The east face of Mt. Ololokwe, showing the line of 100 Percent Not Losing (1,300', 5.13a.) After an attempt in 2016, the climbers returned a year later to finish the 13-pitch route.



Brittany Griffith leads the Lo-Brow crack (pitch nine, 5.11+).



Kate Rutherford redpointing a 5.12 pitch high on the route.

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