



AAC Publications

Great Spitzkoppe, Northwest Face, Mamba No. 5, and Other New Routes

Namibia, Damaraland, Spitzkoppe Range

In early 2016 a friend and mountain guide from South Africa, Neil Margetts, sent me a photograph taken from a small plane of the northwest wall of Great Spitzkoppe. He had seen the photo on a friend's Facebook page, and he was quick to spot the climbing potential. The photo showed two long and steep corner/groove systems that appeared to be unclimbed.

Our research led us to conclude that the left corner was an old project named Big Hands (Alard Hufner and Voitek Modrzewski, early 2000s). This attempted to follow a large flake system halfway up the wall and finished on a pedestal of rock below a blank slab. The upper half of the corner was blocked by a steep featureless slab and has not been attempted. To the best of our knowledge, the right groove system had never been attempted.

Neil and I made our first trip out in July 2017. We contacted a local climber, Richard Ford, who provided excellent information, and we invited him to join us on our trip. Richard is a member of the Mountain Club of South Africa (MSCA), Namibia Section, and we felt it would be proper to include a representative of the small local climbing community.

The northwest wall of Great Spitzkoppe is steep, and as the climbing tends not to have continuous crack systems, we decided that the best option was to approach the routes from the top down. We approached via the regular route on the northeast side (5.8, long scramble and 5 pitches, Hans and Else Wongtschofsy and J. De V. Graaf, 1946).

Neil Margetts I first abseiled into the left corner to explore. The climbing looked hard but possible. Lacking ledges, we established bolted belays at hanging stances at 60m intervals. The last pitch just before reaching the final belay stance on the Big Hands Project steepens to vertical without features to climb. We concluded this would have to be an aid pitch and would most likely require the installation of a bolt ladder, so we decided to focus on the right groove.

This line looked much more promising. The top two pitches would provide hard slab climbing. The groove feature looked excellent, with good rock, funky trad placements (threads and cams in pockets), and what appeared to be interesting and not overly difficult climbing. The entry to the groove looked particularly good, with slab climbing through overlaps into a vertical layback on pockets where you enter into the bottom of the groove. There would be some further hard slab climbing and easier entry pitches climbing up a thin, friable flake system. We decided to focus our efforts on this yet un-attempted route. We didn't have much time on this trip, so would have to return the following year. We did, however, manage to establish a three-pitch new route, *Blowing Up the Post Box* (5.8,) named after Neil's teenage antics at the home of his elderly neighbors.

In September 2018, I returned to Spitzkoppe to complete our project with a large team: Richard Ford (Namibia), Paul Maine (U.K.), Lawrence Smoker (U.K.), Hugh Thomas (U.K.), David Barlow (U.K.) and myself (South Africa/U.K.). Sadly, Neil could not make this trip and kindly granted permission for Richard and me to continue and establish the northwest wall project that we had investigated together the previous year.

On our first day, rambling early before breakfast, we discovered and climbed a new single-pitch route

up a crack line on a large boulder behind our campsite. We called the route Breakfast Crack (5.9). After breakfast, the whole group climbed the recently established Beyond Plaisir (III 5.10a, 12 pitches), put up by James Garrett and Timmy O'Neill (AAJ 2017). This route is set to become a classic of the area and has excellent and varied climbing.

We started working on the Spitzkoppe project on our second day. I recruited some porter assistance from the other chaps, and once at the start of the regular route, they continued up to the summit and I abseiled down the wall, cleaning and equipping the upper pitches. Each of the 10 pitches on the climb has bolt protection, but many also require wires, cams, and threads. Later, Paul and Lawrence kindly offered to support me on a reconnaissance session on the route, and we abseiled down to try the upper pitches free. The climbing proved harder than we had expected.

Richard and I returned a couple of days later to attempt a ground-up ascent. The first two pitches follow a flake system up a slab. At the base of the route, move up left onto a spur and follow this to the obvious flake system. The climbing is pleasant and mostly on good rock, but some sections of the flake are friable. This doesn't detract much from the climbing, as there are adequate and solid edges for feet on the slab (5.10+). From the top of the flake, move down and right before continuing up the flake system to where it steepens. Friction and edge out left (hard) to a white streak, and follow this to a belay on the right (5.12-). Climb up the short groove, taking care with the loose rock on the right (5.10-).

Next is the entry pitch to the main groove system, with excellent and varied climbing. Climb up slabs, moving right past two overlaps, to the base of a steep layback system. Make a hard move to get established into the layback, and continue up pockets to reach a fig tree. Continue into the bottom of the groove up to a stance below a large thread (5.11+).

Continue up the excellent groove for two pitches by back-and-footing, bridging, and spanning with "Quarryman" moves (shuffling two hands on one wall and two feet on the other, named after a famous climb in North Wales). The final difficult moves are rewarded with an excellent jug to pull onto the belay stance (5.11-). This section was nicknamed the Birthing Canal, due to the strenuous noises emitted by everyone while climbing these pitches.

Continue up the groove for 5m before moving out left on edges (bolts) to reach a flake system (gear) and a tricky final long reach to the belay on the left under a fig tree (5.11-). Climb up the seam on the left and follow the bolts, first trending right, then left, to the belay. This pitch is a long and difficult slab (5.12b or 5.11+ A0). We didn't manage to free this pitch on the day because of the heat—it would be better to climb this route earlier in the winter. Follow the bolts up right, then left, to easier ground (5.11-).

Scramble up the easy final gulley to reach the first fifth-class pitch of the Regular Route. This is an excellent finish, and the additional five pitches make for a big day out. Descend via the regular descent or squeeze back through to the start of the regular route and rappel the route (2x 60m ropes required).

The team established three further new routes on this trip. David Barlow, Hugh Thomas, and I established Mrs. Balls (5.10c X), named after a local chutney and the high-pitched noises emanating from the distressed leader on the very scary first pitch. The route was established ground-up and on sight. One peg and one bolt were hand-placed on the route on lead; there is no other fixed gear.

The route is located on the left side of Agua Marcelino. Climb up a shallow corner crack to a ledge about 25m high, clip the bolt, and take a deep breath. Continue boldly up the unprotected slab for 25–30m to reach a wide crack system and an awkward belay (5.10+ X). The leader managed to place a skyhook in a pocket and a number 2 RP between two granite crystals, but in reality these would not hold a fall. Continue up the excellent wide crack to belay on chockstones (5.8). Continue up the crack and move right to a ramp system to steep twin cracks (good pro) and follow these until they end,

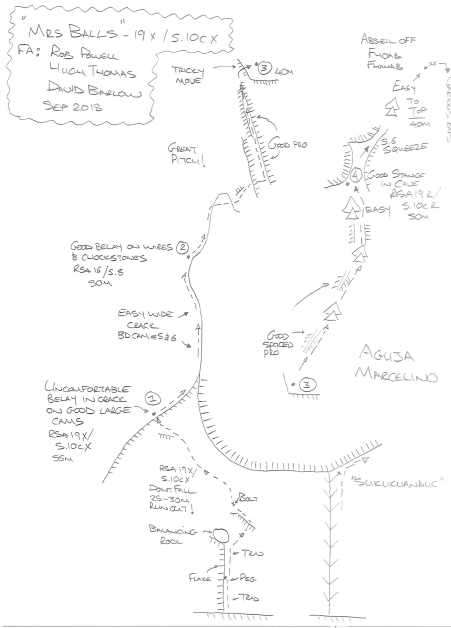
making a tricky move to get established on the belay ledge (5.10+). Follow a faint groove system up a slab that, despite appearances, has good but spaced gear, followed by an easy slab and a belay in a cave (5.10+). Chimney up the inside of the cave and move out left and up to the top (5.6). Or enter the cave and traverse out back right and then climb up. Abseil down the bolted route Fhoab Fhanab.

Lawrence and Paul established the two-pitch bolted route Dykotomy (5.8) on an unnamed rock slab at campsite No. 14. The route follows an excellent dihedral with a dyke in the centre. Climb the groove to step left over an arête into the dihedral. Climb up slippery rock to reach a hole and the belay. Continue up the much easier second pitch to the top of the slab. Walk off right.

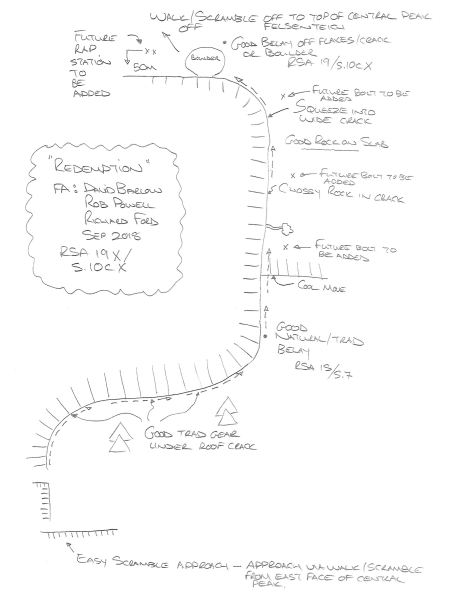
On the last day of the trip, David, Richard, and I climbed a new two-pitch trad line on the east face of the central peak of the Felsenteich. We established the route ground-up, and since we'd failed on another attempt earlier that day, we named the route Redemption (5.10+ R/X). The route climbs the underside of a large roof and an obvious right-facing corner system. Climb up a slab to the roof and move right to a hanging belay where the roof ends (5.7). Climb up the corner through an overlap (crux). Place gear. Climb up past a small tree. The crack goes very wide and a bit chossy. Move up carefully, using the slab and the offwidth crack (arm bar) and then layback. There is no gear for the last 12 meters. Reach a good stance on top of the corner and belay on large blocks (5.10+). Abseil off large blocks (tat required) or scramble up to the top and walk off. Any future ascensionists are welcome to add three bolts to the corner system on the second pitch to make future ascents more pleasurable.

During our stay we climbed many other classic routes in the area. There are excellent opportunities for new routes. Bolting is restricted and needs to be organized with the MCSA Namibia Section. There are excellent camping facilities, including solar-heated showers. It is best to do all your shopping and logistics in Windhoek prior to driving out to Spitzkoppe. The locals are friendly, and the area is largely crime-free. The Shebeen, the local bar, is especially fun on the weekends.

– Robert Powell, South Africa, and David Barlow, U.K.



Topo for Mrs. Balls



Topo for Redemption.

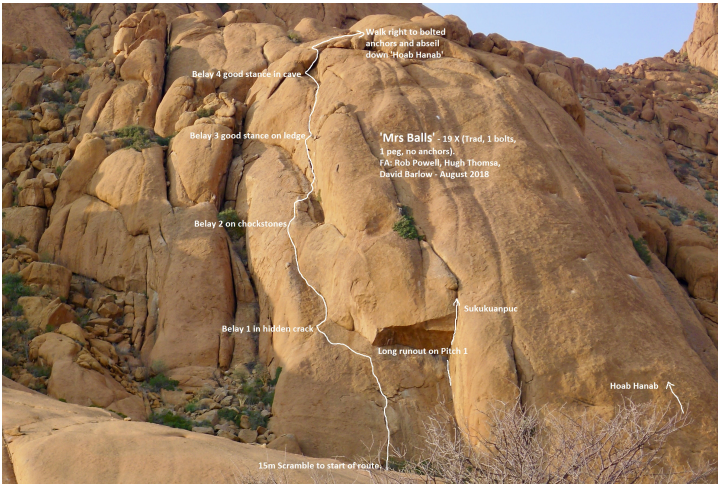


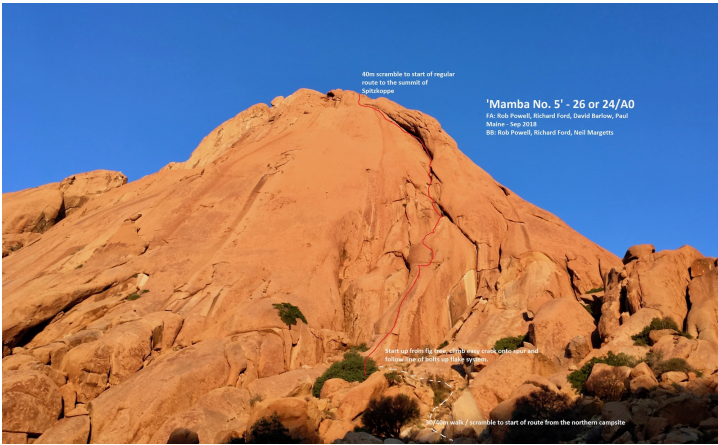
Photo topo for Mrs. Balls on Agua Marcelino.



Hugh Thomas climbing the excellent wide crack on pitch two of Mrs. Balls.



The nothwest face of Great Spitzkoppe, showing the line of Mamba No. 5. Another five pitches up the regular route gains the summit.



The line of Mamba No. 5 on Great Spitzzoppe.



David Barlow on thin slab climbing on the third pitch of Mamba No. 5.



Traditional chimney climbing on the second groove pitch (pitch six) of Mamba No. 5.



The east face of the central peak of Felsenteich with the route Redemption marked.



Robert Powell leading the second pitch of Redemption. The crack gets very wide and unprotected from just above where the leader currently is.

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