



AAC Publications

Conda Area, New Routes and First Ascents of Domes

Angola, Cuanza Sul

During July 2024, our team of five Spaniards—Miguel A. Díaz, Alex Gonzalez, Indi Gutierrez, Jaime Peiró, and me, Manu Ponce—traveled to Angola in search of new big walls. Having many options to explore, in the end we decided to start in the Conda region of Cuanza Sul province, around eight hours south of Luanda, the capital. Once in Conda, we headed about 10km south to the village of Cumbira Segundo (11°1229.0S, 14°2017.8E).

We knew from past reports that we would find big walls, but the reality far exceeded what we imagined. Amid the lush jungles surrounding the small village of Cumbira Segundo were enormous granite domes, between 200m and 400m tall. Some of these had been climbed before, but many were virgin.

In this type of adventure, the easiest aspect is often the climbing itself, and this was true here, as the dense vegetation, full of wild animals—many of them very poisonous—required us to open paths to the walls with extreme care. Taking turns, we chopped through the jungle with machetes meter by meter until we reached our starting points.

Once on the wall, we were in our element, though temperatures were scorching: between 20°C and 25°C, with almost 100 percent humidity. These were truly tropical conditions. We tried to choose walls in the shade, although this wasn't always possible.

We climbed everything ground-up, using bolts as sparingly as possible, though some of the walls had very little opportunity for removable protection. Most of our routes involved technical slab climbing, with few cracks, poor handholds, and friction-dependent footwork. This meant that, at the end of the day, you would end up with your head mentally “fried.”

We had several wild moments during the expedition: falls of more than ten meters with a drill included, scorpions as big as your hand defending their nest as you climbed, and running into black mambas on the nightly return to camp. Despite this, if asked if we would return, we would all answer without hesitation: *Sim, claro!*

In total, we opened seven routes on six different peaks, two of which had never been summited before. This totaled around 2,000m of climbing, all of which made us sweat meter by meter. The seven routes were:

Bon Día Boa Noite (420m climbing distance, 7a) on Hande (11°1246.1S, 14°1931.2E).

Peluchitos (380m, 7b) on Hande.

Vuelta al Armario por Festivos (350m, 6b+) on Cunduvile (11°1233.3S, 14°2004.5E).

Quero verte Você (100m, 6a+) on Wende (11°1232.0S, 14°1955.2E), first ascent of the formation.

Raizes (200m, 6c) on Leca (11°1223.7S, 14°1933.7E), first ascent of the formation.

Os Mulatos (130m, 6c+), the first climbing route on Cawanji (11°1157.9S, 14°1953.7E). The formation can be ascended by hiking via another route.

Fumaca Densa (115m, 7b) on Nhenje (11°1131.9S, 14°2005.3E).

We received much valuable help from Nathan Cahill of Climb Angola, and Lucho Birkner and Javiera Ayala from the nonprofit Climbing for a Reason. The local community, specifically all the children the latter organization works with, helped us from the moment we got up each day until we returned in the evening through the dense vegetation. A very humble community opened its arms to us without asking for anything in return.

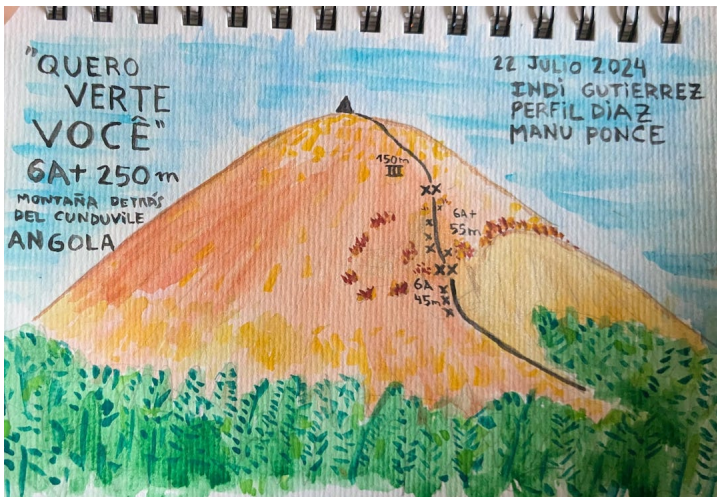
We are particularly grateful for the work Climbing for a Reason is doing in this place. It has given life and a lot of hope to a large part of the town's population: the children. Due to the incredible climbing and potential for route development here, we are sure this place soon will be visited by people from all over the world. Climbing for a Reason is helping prepare and teach the inhabitants what can be done in their "garden."

In all, we are very happy with what we have achieved, and more importantly with the experience we had with the people of Cumbira Segundo. Our weeks were full of learning, and we came to feel comfortable in a wild terrain full of surprises.

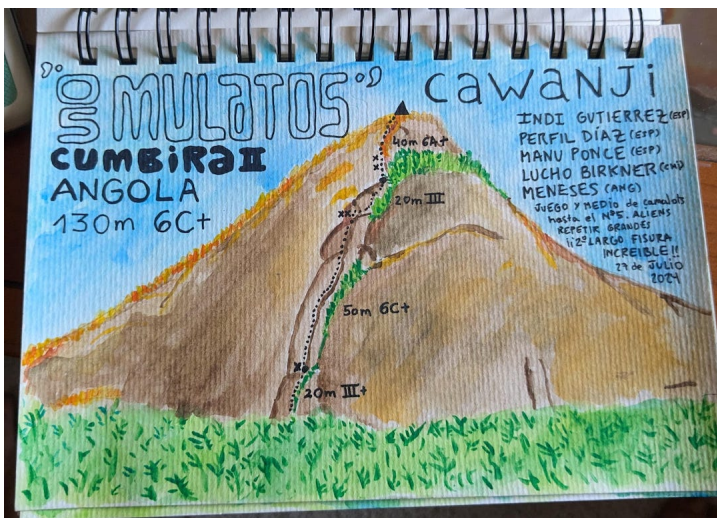
—Manu Ponce, Spain

Previous Climbs in Conda: Previously unreported in the AAJ, Portuguese climber Rui Araújo and Angolan Pedro Cunha opened the first route in the Conda region, up the southern shoulder of the Cunduvile dome, in 2013. Their bolted line, Cumbira, entails 300m of mostly mid-5th class, with a single pitch of 5.8+, completed in six pitches. In 2014 and 2015, the husband-and-wife duo of Patrick Murdock (USA) and Isabela Murdock (Portugal) opened lightly bolted routes on three other domes: Hande, Beehive Rock (11°0359.0S, 14°2236.9E), and Pedra Chicunda (11°1436.2S, 14°2206.8E). Before Ponce's 2024 expedition, these four routes were the only known climbs on the domes around Conda.

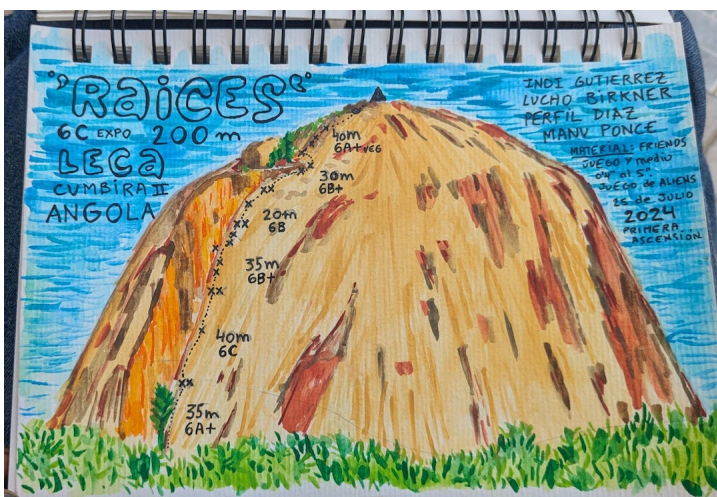
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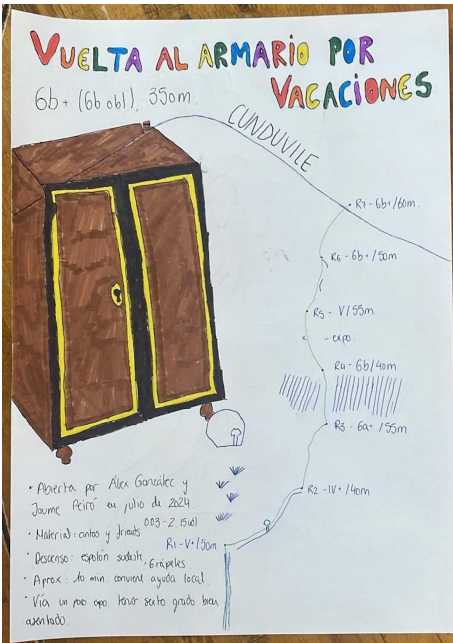
A hand-illustrated topo showing the new route Quero verte Você (100m, 6a+) on Wende. This route marked the first ascent of the formation.



A hand-illustrated topo showing the four-pitch new route Os Mulatos (130m, 6c+). Mulatos is the first route on the Cawanji formation.



A hand-illustrated topo showing the route Raices (200m, 6c) on Leca. This route marked the formation's first ascent.



A hand-illustrated topo showing the new route Vuelta al Armario por Festivos (350m, 6b+), on Cunduvile.



A hand-illustrated topo showing the new route Fumaca Densa (115m, 7a) on Nhenje.



A group of women from Cumbira Segundo. The Angolan village is surrounded by many large granite domes.



The prow of the Hande formation rises above the mist. The team established two routes on this rock, Bon Día Boa Noite (420m, 7a) and Peluchitos (380m, 7b).



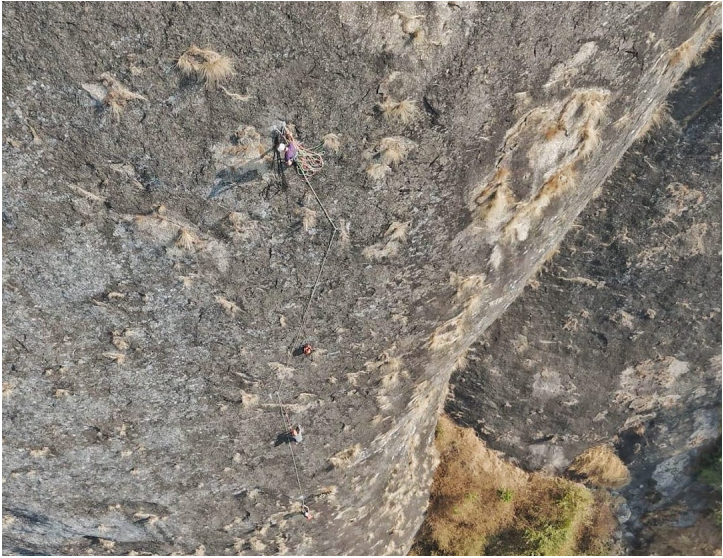
The granite dome Hande rising above mist. This formation is home to two new routes, Bon Día Boa Noite (420m, 7a) and Peluchitos (380m, 7b).



Climbing the new route Bon Día Boa Noite on Hande. Establishing the 420-meter 7a was the highlight of the July 2024 trip, said Manu Ponce.



From left to right, Indi Gutierrez, Chilean Lucho Birkner of Climbing for a Reason, Manu Ponce, and Miguel A. Díaz on the summit of Leca, after their first ascent of the dome via the route Raizes (200m, 6c). The dome Hande rises behind, to the south.



Miguel A. Díaz, Indi Gutierrez, and Manu Ponce tackling the second pitch of Hande's Bon día Boa Noite (420m, 7a).

Article Details

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| Author | Manu Ponce |
| Publication | AAJ |
| Volume | 65 |
| Issue | 98 |
| Page | |
| Copyright Date | 2024 |
| Article Type | Climbs and expeditions |