



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 I, Manu Ponce—traveled to Angola in search of new big walls in the Conda region of Cuanza Sul province, around eight hours south of Luanda, the capital. Once in Conda, we headed about ten kilometers south to the village of Cumbira Segundo (11°12'29.0"S, 14°20'17.8"E). We knew from past reports that we would find walls, but the reality far exceeded what we imagined. Amid the lush jungles surrounding the small village of Cumbira Segundo were granite domes between 200m and 400m tall. Some of these had been climbed, but many had not.

In this type of adventure, the easiest aspect is often the climbing itself, and this was true here, as the dense vegetation, full of snakes and arachnids—many of them 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. 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. At the end of the day, you would end up 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 peaks, two of which had never been summited. 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°12'46.1"S, 14°19'31.2"E).

Peluchitos (380m, 7b) on Hande.

Vuelta al Armario por Festivos (350m, 6b+) on Cunduvile (11°12'33.3"S, 14°20'04.5"E).

Quero verte Você (100m, 6a+) on Wende (11°12'32.0"S, 14°19'55.2"E), first ascent of the formation.

Raizes (200m, 6c) on Leca (11°12'23.7"S, 14°19'33.7"E), first ascent of the formation.

Os Mulatos (130m, 6c+), the first climbing route on Cawanji (11°11'57.9"S, 14°19'53.7"E). The formation can be ascended by hiking via another route.

Fumaca Densa (115m, 7b) on Nhenje (11°11'31.9"S, 14°20'05.3"E).

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°03'59.0"S, 14°22'36.9"E), and Pedra Chicunda (11°14'36.2"S, 14°22'06.8"E). Before Ponce's 2024 expedition, these four routes were the only known climbs on the domes around Conda.

In addition to the climbs described above, a Spanish women's group opened a new route, A Emboscada das Formigas (100m, 7a+), on the Cawanji formation in 2024. A photo-topo for this climb is in the gallery below.

Images

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