Phandambiri and Montanha Filho

Mozambique

Samuele Mazzolini solves the crux pitch (8a) of Templo dos Macacos on Montanha Filho. Photo by Manrico Dell'Agnola

Phandambiri is a 1,436-meter granite monolith (18°1’25”S, 33°33’30”E) located on a private reserve in Macossa District in west-central Mozambique. The closest administrative office is in Nhamanguawa, three hours to the north. Here, Samuele Mazzolini and I obtained a permit to attempt to climb the huge Phandambiri dome. To respect the local culture, it was also necessary for us to perform a ritual with the tribal chief in Dzembe, a nearby village.

In early August, Samuele and I set up base camp in front of Phandambiri’s east face, around five to ten minutes from a water source, a small stream that flows from the base of the peak. The route we established over the next six days, O Caminho dos Cogumelos (“The Path of the Mushrooms,” 890m of climbing plus scrambling, 7a), runs right up the middle of the east face, primarily following low-angle terrain with a lot of knobs. The harder pitches are steeper and more powerful.

It was impossible to protect our route with traditional gear, other than some slings on knobs; we free climbed and placed bolts while hanging on hooks or slings. On August 6, we finished our climb on the north summit. This peak seems to be roughly 50 meters lower than the south summit, but we were unable to confirm the exact elevation difference.

The 19-pitch line of O Caminho dos Cogumelos is fully bolted for leading (73 bolts in total), and repeat parties will need only eight quickdraws for the longest pitches. A one-day ascent would require moving quickly, as the route only falls into the shade around 1 or 2 p.m., and darkness fell by 5:30 p.m. during our visit.

On August 9, another team of climbers from our group—Manrico Dell’Agnola, Antonella Giacomini, Maurizio Giordani, and Nancy Paoletto—established a second line on Phandambiri: Il Mistero del Phandambiri (“The Mystery of Phandambiri,” 1,100m, 6c). Their route climbs a prow on the southeast face and ends on the higher south summit. They put it up over six days, with two bivouacs, following similarly slabby, difficult-to-protect terrain. The route enters the shade around 3 p.m.; it is also quite windy, as it ascends a prominent buttress.

The route name comes from a mystery about the possible first ascensionists of Phandambiri. High on their route, our teammates found a few ancient bolts (at least 40 years old) in places that made no logical sense from a climber’s perspective. We believe the bolts may be linked to military units attempting to install themselves on the mountain during Mozambique’s civil war (1977–1992), but we could not learn anything about this from the local people.

Samuele and I also established a shorter route on Montanha Filho, a formation about 200 meters away from the southern edge of Phandambiri’s east face. Filho has a steep, featured northeast face, which is shaded after 2 or 3 p.m. Templo dos Macacos (“Monkey Temple,” 270m, 8a) has seven pitches and is also fully bolt-protected (44 total bolts). The longest pitch, the 40-meter 8a crux, requires a dozen quickdraws. This endurance-focused and crimpy section has some small, delicate holds that could break. After it was bolted, I returned and climbed the route in one push, ground-up.

For future visitors to Phandambiri, some of the administrative hoops we had to go through might be unnecessary. However, climbers should still notify the local Nhamanguawa authorities before arrival, both for security and cultural reasons. They will coordinate with tribal authorities and the owner of the reserve, and will carry out the necessary traditional practices required to climb on the mountain.

—Mirco Grasso, Italy

O Caminho Dos Cogumelos (890m, 7a), Phandambiri

L1: 5b, 4bolts 45m

L2: 6b+, 5bolts 35m

L3: 5c, 5bolts 55m

L4: 6a, 5bolts 50m

L5: 6b, 5bolts 30m

L6: 6a+, 4bolts 30m

L7: 7a, 6bolts 55m

L8: 3a, 2bolts 55m

L9: 6a+, 5bolts 40m

L10: 6a+, 6bolts 55m

L11: 6a+, 7bolts 45m

L12: 6c, 7bolts 55m

L13: I, 30m

L14: 5c, 2bolts 45m

L15: 6a, 4bolts 55m

L16: 6a+ 3bolts 50m

L17: 6b 3bolts 55m

L18: IV+ 55m

L19: IV 50m

100m to the summit

Templo dos Macacos (270m, 8a), Montanha Filho

L1: IV, 2bolts 50m

L2: 6a, 2bolts 50m

L3: 6c, 5bolts 35m

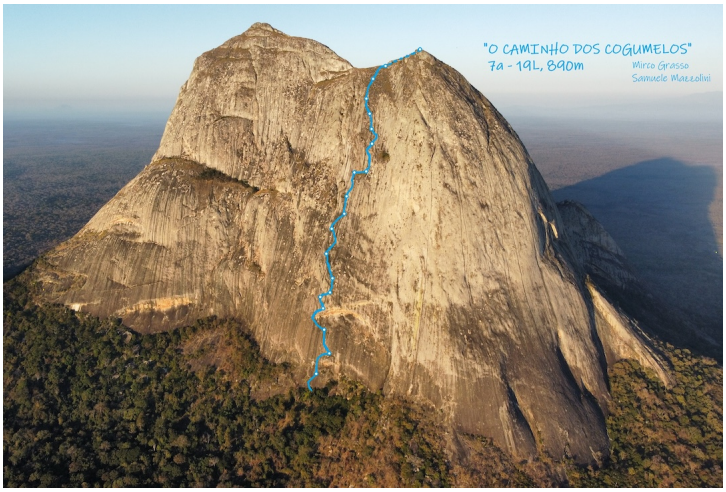
L4: 6c+, 5bolts 45m

L5: 8a, 12bolts 40m

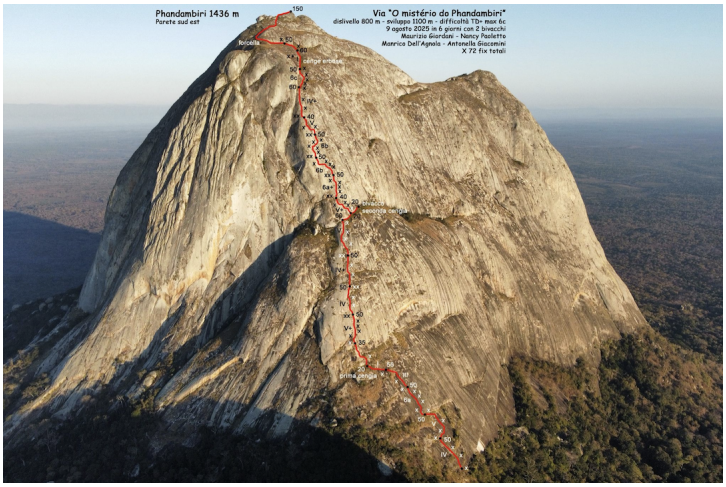
L6: 7a+, 8bolts 30m

L7: 7b, 5bolts 20m

Images



Phandambiri (1,436m) from the east, with the line of O Caminho dos Cogumelos (890m climbing distance plus scrambling, 7a). The route Il Mistero del Phandambiri follows the left skyline. Both routes were climbed in 2025.



Il Mistero del Phandambiri (1,100m, 6c) on the Phandambiri formation.



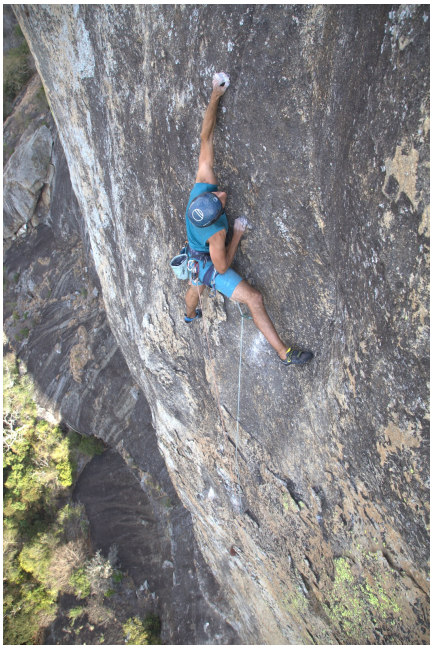
Mirco Grasso on the sixth pitch of O Caminho dos Cogumelos. The smaller formation in back is Montanha Filho; the 270-meter route Templo dos Macacos (8a) is near the left skyline.



The line of Templo dos Macacos on Montanha Filho.



Samuele Mazzolini solves the crux pitch (8a) of Templo dos Macacos on Montanha Filho.



Mirco Grasso reaches high on Templo dos Macacos on Montanha Filho.

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