



AAC Publications

Mt. Namuli, southeast face

Africa, Mozambique

Mt. Namuli is located in the northeast of Mozambique, in the Zambezia province, and is a striking granite inselberg with twin summits topping out at 2,418m.

In May, Kate Rutherford and I completed the first technical route up the mountain. Our 12-pitch route, Majka and Kate's Science Project (600m, IV 5.10-), was established both in the name of research and the intention to create a compelling climbing line. We completed the route while on the "Lost Mountain" expedition, combining rock climbing, cliff-side scientific research, and integrated conservation planning.

I first traveled to this part of Mozambique in 2011, with climber Sarah Garlick (USA), filmmaker Paul Yoo (USA), and herpetologist Werner Condradie (South Africa). Our goal was to determine if there was viable climbing on the 600m wall, if that climbing would allow access to relevant new terrain for science, and if the local community would welcome a project combining science and conservation.

During that first trip Garlick and I reconned the face via a vegetation-choked crack system. Given that we were there for science, we welcomed the vegetation right up until we had to figure out a way to dig through it to place protection. The crack was the only continuous line we could find on the southeast face—a wide expanse of undulating granite waves with open slabs broken up by grass and hedge tufts. Time constraints, coupled with the knowledge that we'd have to come back and re-lead everything on a full expedition in the future, halted our progress after three pitches. Each pitch took one and a half to two hours to lead, but we rappelled to the ground in one double-rope rappel. I vowed I'd return with ice axes and garden rakes...as well as entomologists.

Our primary 2014 expedition team consisted of climbers Kate Rutherford (USA) and I, along with scientists Flavia Esteves (entomologist, Brazil), Harith Farooq (herpetologist, Mozambique), and Caswell Munyai (entomologist, South Africa). LUPA, the Lost Mountain's Mozambican conservation partner, and a robust group of volunteers joined us. The expedition started at Malawi's Mulanje Massif (9,850'), where Rutherford and I "warmed" up our grass-climbing skills on Gordon's Gully on Chambe Peak (this route is detailed in Frank Easwood's *Guide to the Mulanje Massif*, which is out of print).

After traveling overland to Namuli and transporting our team to the base, we met with scientists to determine the best line to accommodate their research needs. The climbing route was established to connect scientifically interesting zones on Mt. Namuli. The science team prioritized a hanging pocket forest at ca 1,600m, a vegetated chimney above, and the higher altitude sedge communities near the summit. Rutherford and I climbed the route, slinging over three dozen grass clumps—known as sedges, some the size of an adult torso, other's the size of a child's ankle—for protection. Only 40' of route took any natural protection. We placed a dozen bolts and bolted belays, all on lead. The ice axes stayed in camp, as the route took a natural slab and sedge line up the face. It's worth noting that it's been scientifically confirmed (by our entomologists as they peeled back the sedges to collect ants) that the sedges are simply adhered to the blank slabs, with no root systems penetrating the rock. A strategy of all points on and levitation was useful. The final two crux pitches were nearly perfect 5.10 slabs.

After our ascent we brought Farooq and Munyai partway up the face for their research, while Esteves

completed a full ascent, with Rutherford and I collecting specimens along the way. Expedition members Peter Doucette and Charlie Harrison made the second ascent of the route before the expedition's end. More information on the route and research project, as well as a forthcoming film, can be found at www.thelostmountainproject.com.

– Majka Burhardt, USA

Images



Majka Burhardt leads the single crack found on Majka and Kate's Science Project (600m, IV 5.10-).



Majka and Kate's Science Project (600m, IV 5.10-), on Mt. Namuli's southeast face.



Kate Rutherford leading a grassy slab on Majka and Kate's Science Project (600m, IV 5.10-).

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