



Mt. Kenya, Diamond Buttress, The Wyoming Route

Kenya, Mt. Kenya

Mt. Kenya (17,057'/5,199m), the second-highest peak on the African continent, has been all but forgotten in the annals of alpinism. Since 2000, only a few new routes have been established on the complex peak, with the most notable, put up by German climbers on the east face of Nelion, using bolts (see AAJ 2015). Wyoming climber Justin Bowen and I wanted to climb a new route with no bolts, no pins, no preview, and no aid.

We arrived at Mt. Kenya National Park on January 5, 2023, and the next day reached Mackinder's Hut at 4,200m, where we checked the forecast and found we would have only one good day of weather in the next week. The good day was tomorrow. So much for acclimatization.

We had planned to try something new on the mountain's east face, but it was covered in snow, so we quickly shifted to a line cleaving the Diamond Buttress on Batian's south face, a dihedral right of the original route and left of the now emasculated Diamond Couloir. We humped up to 4,425m, spent one short night at the American Camp, then started up the mountain.

Carrying heavyish alpine packs (between us: two gallons of water, one pair of boots—Justin wore holey approach shoes—a pair of crampons, one ice axe, one sleeping bag, nuts, fruit, and biltong), we reached the the south face at 7 a.m.

The Darwin Glacier has vanished since the first routes on the Diamond Buttress were established in the 1970s, so we carefully zigzagged up four pitches of newly exposed, verglas-coated choss, using an ice axe to chop out nut placements, to reach the base of our dihedral. What followed: 5.10, 5.9, 5.11, 5.11, 5.9, a slab traverse right for two pitches, 5.10+, 5.9 R, 5.8 R, 5.8, and finally a slab traverse left for three pitches to the southwest ridge, where we were benighted. We tied ourselves to the wall and prepared for a shiver bivy. Justin generously gave me the sleeping bag, and he stuffed his feet into a plastic bag. It was a long, cold night, as bivouacs always are.

The next morning we did three easy pitches to the summit of Batian, a 400' rap down into the snowy Gate of Mists, and an arduous post-holing climb back up Nelion (5,188m). We spent ten minutes resting in the Howell Hut on top before descending. After 13 raps down to the talus and a one-hour walk across the Lewis Glacier moraine, we arrived at the Austrian Hut, where I collapsed from exhaustion.

I could not have done this route without Justin. His youthful strength and courage carried the day. He led the hard pitches, one of which, the first 5.11, was vertical face climbing on crumbly rock with imaginary pro. We named the line The Wyoming Route (1,500', 22 pitches, 5.11 R).

— Mark Jenkins, USA

Images

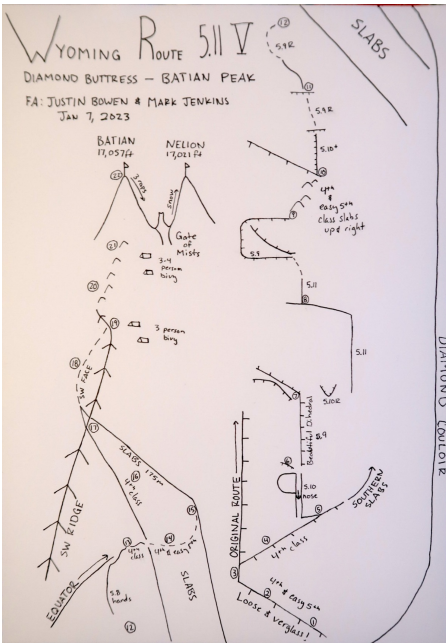


Mt. Kenya's Batian summit (5,199m) from the south, showing the approximate lines of routes up the Diamond Buttress.

(1) Southwest ridge (1946). (2) Diamond Buttress Direct (1978). (3) The Mediterranean Route (1980). (4) Equator (1979). (5) Diamond Buttress Original route (1976). (6) The Wyoming Route (2023). Not shown is the Southern Slabs Route (1961), just left of the icy Diamond Couloir (1973). Nelion (5,188m) is the peak to the right.



The Wyoming Route on the Diamond Buttress of Batian, Mt. Kenya.



Topo for the Wyoming Route (2022) on the Diamond Butte of Batian, Mt. Kenya.



Justin Bowen leading pitch six of the Wyoming Route (5.10 fingers), "fully loaded for an alpine bivy we fully expected not to have to do."



"Justin in fair early morning weather when we still thought we would get it done in a day."



Justin Bowen leading pitch seven of the Wyoming Route, a beautiful 5.9 dihedral. "The sun was already gone and it was getting cold."



Justin Bowen on 5.9 flared hands on the Wyoming Route as late afternoon bad weather rolled in.



Mark Jenkins nearing the top of pitch six on the Wyoming Route, already dressed for winter.



Justin Bowen rappelling into the Gate of Mist on Mt. Kenya after summiting Batian during the morning of day two on the Wyoming Route.

Article Details

Author	Mark Jenkins
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	97
Page	261
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions