



Great Spitzkoppe, North Face, This is Africa

Namibia

Following successful trips in 2017 and 2018, with various new routes opened (see AAJ 2019), I returned to the Spitzkoppe in August 2022 for more of the same. This time I was joined by my partner, Vittoria Camisassi, on her first trip to Spitzkoppe.

On a previous visit, a local climber had showed me an unclimbed line on the upper north face of Great Spitzkoppe (1,728m): a huge arching crack system that started from below Three Step Chimney, a well-known feature on the scrambling approach to Spitzkoppe's normal route. The line was very diagonal and appeared to follow a continuous crack system, making a ground-up attempt desirable. Any loose rock could be trundled with little risk of pancaking your belayer or cutting your ropes.

Our trip coincided with the 2022 Mountain Club of South Africa National Meet. In exchange for some route-finding knowledge, we recruited some of the MCSA members to help us carry up equipment and water. We would start working on our line while they climbed the regular route of Spitzkoppe.

On our first day on the route, Vittoria and I climbed two pitches, placing some bolts on lead, and fixed a rope to rappel off. We figured we would head back early for a beer with the MCSA crew, but it turned out one of the climbers had broken his heel, and we had a late night helping them down the long and complex descent.

A few days later, Vi and I returned and pushed the route up several more pitches. On the fifth pitch, while I was placing the final bolt before the belay, my last drill bit overheated and sheared off. We would have to return another day to install the belay and climb the last easy pitch.

And so, after a two-week safari in Botswana, we returned and finished the job. Three pitches had gone free (all 5.11), and as we abseiled down the route, we freed the third pitch at 5.11+. But the fifth pitch evaded my attempts, leaving one move left to free (estimated at 5.12a). Hopefully by the time this journal is published, we will have freed all of This Is Africa—or at least made a jolly good attempt.

— **Rob Powell, South Africa**

Route Description (Download the topo here.)

A truly remarkable crack climb. If you like chimneys, offwidths, hand jamming, finger jamming, and laybacking, then this is the climb for you.

Gear:

14 quickdraws / extenders

Triple rack of cams BD#0.3 to BD#3, 2 x BD#4, 1 x BD#5, 1 x BD#6

Standard rack of wires and offset wires

Slings for threads

2 x 60m ropes

Pitch 1, 5.11d (estimated) or 5.11a/A0, 35m

7 bolts and trad. Big cams essential. Climbing up the slightly suspect holds to access the chimney proper (bolts). Climb up the chimney clipping bolts until able to place your biggest cams and still clip the occasional bolt. The chimney turns into an offwidth BD#4 crack toward the top of the pitch. Struggle up this to gain a bolted semi-hanging stance.

Pitch 2, 5.11a

1 bolt and trad (note that the bolt may be removed as it was placed to kick off a large flake during the first ascent). Climb up the excellent steep corner crack on good jams. The corner leads to a series of adjacent cracks; move up these to the rightward-trending roof / corner crack. Climb past a bolt into the roof crack and make a series of excellent moves with good pro and bomber jams, including a hands-free kneebar under the roof (wild!). The crack tapers closed at the bolted hanging stance.

Pitch 3, 5.11d

3 bolts and trad. The crack is too small to be helpful. Make a reachy move to a good hold on the face that allows you to clip the first bolt. A hard boulder sequence on the face leads past this and back into the crack, allowing you to clip the second bolt. Continue up the crack via sustained laybacks and jamming. Eventually you reach another bolt that is placed to keep your rope to the left of a flake. Climb past the flake, treating it with care (it is well connected from the top, but the bottom half appears unattached) to a hanging bolted stance.

Pitch 4, 5.11b

4 Bolts and trad. Continue up the crack, which is thankfully easier, past a fig creeper, into a chimney, and up a slab (past two bolts) to a bolted stance.

Pitch 5, 5.12a (estimated) or 5.10d/A0:

Mostly bolted but crucial cam placements in the horizontal break before the boulder problem crux. Climb rightward along an easy slab on good rock until a steep wall forces you up toward the roof. Make delicate moves to gain the rail (crucial gear). Move right and up (crux) into the undercut wall with slippery and delicate footwork on the slab (bolts). Make powerful moves right past the arete and move onto the slab (closely bolted). Once established on the slab, move easily right to a bolted stance on a ledge.

Pitch 6, easy 5th class

Trad. Move right from the stance and up onto a ledge. Walk up a narrow chimney until it is possible to climb up an easy ramp on the right. Climb this to a bolted stance on a ledge. This is the first abseil on the normal descent route.

Pitch 7, easy 4th class

Scramble right and up to the summit.

Descent: Follow the regular descent route from the summit. If bailing off the route before the end, note that most abseils will require back clipping.

Images



Great Spitzkoppe from the northwest, showing This is Africa on the upper north face. The upper part of the normal route's approach scramble is marked with an arrow; that route finishes near the right skyline. The long arching crack on the far right is taken by Mamba No. 5, completed by Rob Powell and friends in 2018 (see AAJ 2019).



The line of This is Africa on Great Spitzkoppe from below.



Pitch two of This is Africa on Great Spitzkoppe.



Rob Powell establishing the third pitch of This Is Africa on Great Spitzkoppe.



Looking down the final section of pitch three on This is Africa.

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