

South Africa 1985

Michael Scott

Rock climbing developments here have tended to mirror trends overseas (particularly British) although usually several years later. We now appear to have reached the stage where the enthusiasm is for small crags or boulders, with short walks to get to a vertical gymnasium. There have however continued to be some notable achievements on the big walls, especially solo ascents.

South Africans have continued to perform reasonably well overseas and this last season included some visits to the Ruwenzori. One team, consisting of Armand Hughes d'Aeth, Rob Brand and Clive Ward, climbed a new route up 600m of grade 6 mixed snow and rock on the NE ridge of Savoia (4977m), a southern peak on Mt Stanley. They spent two days climbing it in a blizzard and declared it to be currently the hardest undertaking in the Ruwenzori.

Transvaal

The Magaliesberg kloofs continue to see frantic activity and new routes and aid eliminations too numerous to categorize. The number of new, hard climbers beavering away is very encouraging. At Blouberg, the searing hot cliff in the north, the Razor's Edge (G3) was completed by Smith and Mallory. It aims for a monster dihedral left of the top pitches of Big Corner and ranks as a major climb having taken several days to complete.

Many of the Blouberg classics were repeated by Mallory, Lomax, Haffner, Smith, Bradshaw and others, quite unprecedented numbers for an area so remote.

The Hanglip area also saw some activity, notably by Russ Dodding and Paul Fatti, who opened a variation to the top of Black Widow (G1. M2).

Natal

Steve Bradshaw opened Flames of Sunset at Monteseel. This was the first route to be graded H3 (Australian 26). His usual partner, Adrian Jardin, made the second ascent of White Rider — unrepeatable since Mike Roberts opened it in 1981 at Australian 25/26. Jardin took 21 falls before getting through, which is indicative of the approach accepted by the top climbers to achieve these grades of climbs.

The Drakensberg peak, Mponjwana, had a solo ascent by George Mallory using Snelson's original route.

Cape

Andrew de Klerk completed a spectacular and prestigious season by soloing Renaissance (G3) on Du Toit's Peak in 4hrs 20mins. As someone once described Messner & Habelers' ascent of the Eiger — this was 'vertical running'. De Klerk had achieved an ideal earlier in the year by soloing Oceans of Fear (G3 M3) on the Klein Winterhoek Peak. His epic ascent took four days,

through a chilling rain squall which left him exhausted. He had to abandon his pack on the last pitch and walk out with no gear. Lighter moments between these two events were the climb Heart of Darkness (H1) on the Lion's Head granite, spurred on by Aleck McKirdy's joke cardboard bolt and hanger glued onto an 'impossible' position, which prompted the route. Andrew's free ascents of Winds of Change (H2 and previously mechanical) and his new route Dream Street Rose (I1 or Australian 27/28) both on Elsie's Peak, were accomplished after uncountable falls — a tribute to tenacity.

De Klerk, with Kevin Smith, opened God of Thunder at Krakadouw in the Cedarberg (H3). It overhangs 30m in 70m of climbing.

The Eastern Cape area has had a surge of activity, largely led by expatriate schoolteacher Keith James and some of his pupils. They have opened new climbs in the Swartberg Pass and in the Wolwerivier Gorge area.

Undoubtedly the premier climbing get-together this year was the centenary climb of Toverkop to commemorate Gustav Nefdt's climb. Some 14 people repeated Nefdt's route (F3) conventionally and several found it still a desperate pitch, while three hard lads soloed up and down it, and one climbed it in socks.

