Mexico
New South African ascent of 900m wall

Viva España
Soak up the sun on Spain's perfect limestone

Himalaya
Trekkling on the roof of the world

Slanghoek
Long-awaited new route up Slanghoek's 850m amphitheatre

Montagu Update
All the new routes with topos and pics

Stove review
Brew up in style with the latest cookers

Win free tickets to the 3rd Banff Mountain Film Festival
Free Petzl climbing DVD with every copy - while stocks last
Letters

Sport Climbing at Melville Koppies

Bolts saves lives. It is a proven fact that long run-outs can undoubtedly injure or even take the life of an ill-fated climber. Thanks to pre-placed bolts, sport climbing has become a relatively new form of safe climbing. Sport climbing, by definition, is one where the climber is free from all worries of falling and is able to concentrate fully on the difficulty and enjoyment of the climb.

Why Bolt? The key reason for placing bolts is to reduce all danger involved in an ascent. Bolts should be correctly placed, at regular intervals, in good rock. All climbs end at a firmly fixed double lower-off anchor, such as the anchors at Melville Koppies.

There has been a heated and controversial debate within groups of the local community about the rationale of bolting. The majority of crags in South Africa have been developed traditionally, using removable, hand placed gear. An old-school individual recently expressed his opinion regarding the bolted routes at Melville Koppies. His comments included that the routes should be soloed (meaning climbed without a rope or any protection whatsoever).

What is not realised is that not everyone that rock climbs treks into the mountains with half a ton of hardware and a hammer. While Traditional Climbing is still popular in the world of climbing, it's Sport Climbing that has caught the attention of mainstream society. This is due to the sport becoming a safer and more accessible activity because of fixed protection.

It needs to be recognised that rock climbing has advanced far beyond what it was in the 1970's and 80's. Run-outs of five metres by first ascensionists have been outdated by a decade of new equipment and improved safety standards. Safe falls are now part of the sport, and horrific risks give climbers and the game of climbing a bad reputation.

It seems difficult to justify extremists who do free climbing when the consequences are taken into consideration. Some people who think their life is the only one at risk might pause to consider the potentially disastrous result that a fall can have on a climber's family, friends, and society. Is reckless climbing worth it when safe climbing is within such close reach? At the end of the day, the answers to these questions are up to the individual climber. The line of reasoning here is that the thrilling world of climbing can co-exist with safe climbing.

With traditional climbing no “footprints” are left as evidence of the climbers’ passing, and some prefer it this way. However, in our world today, there are overdeveloped trails, walkways and roads everywhere, as well as unblemished and aesthetic trails in the wilds. There is room for and a necessity for both, at the same time there is a need for pristine climbing and well developed areas for climbing in the world. Some people take pleasure in city parks whilst some enjoy the wild forest. It’s the same in climbing. Some of us enjoy the comfort of a securely placed bolt and some of us love the adventure of working our own way.

In my opinion, freedom is found in safe climbs and risk merely narrows the climbing experience. Sensible bolting in the right areas will create new routes and provide us all with better climbing experiences.

Derek Pienaar

The far side of Kilimanjaro

Story and Photos by Alex Harris

When you’ve been up Africa’s highest mountain five times, you start to think of different ways to do it when planning the sixth. That was the idea for this last trip, so on careful inspection of the map, we decided to climb the mountain by one of its seldom done north routes. To make it even more exciting, we were also planning to sleep in the crater and do some exploration.

The trip was a last-minute thing so we had to fly to Nairobi instead of the normal route as there weren’t any flights to Kilimanjaro international. It was good to follow the route via Nairobi, the same route as the very first time I climbed the mountain. Flying past Kilimanjaro on the way there gave us an idea just how wet the season was. Thick cloud hung over the African skies, hiding everything from view.

Soon we had made our way down to Moshi and had organised our porters and guides. We then drove around the eastern side of the mountain to get to the start of our chosen route. The Rongai route starts just inside the Kenyan border and lies due north of the mountain. Most people tend to do the southern routes with few making the effort to head to the remote north side.

It was in a light drizzle that we started walking up the Rongai route, and over the next four days the drizzle got gradually harder and harder. At one point we just got a glimpse of the mountain, but only barely. The rest of the time it was hidden in thick cloud. Finally we got to Kibo, the high hut, and prepared for our trip up the crater. Everyone else left at one in the morning for the summit while we slept on. Our plan was slightly different. We set off at ten the next morning and slowly made our way up to the crater. It was weird to see the same terrain in the daylight hours. I had only ever seen it in the dark of night. The higher we climbed, the thicker the clouds got, until finally it started snowing. When we got to Gilman’s Point, it was a white out. The seven porters that had carried our camping gear this far were despondent. They dreaded a night in the crater.

After a quick debate on Gilman’s, it was decided to press on to the summit and then decide whether or not we would sleep in the crater. Two hours later at 5PM we arrived at Uhuru, Kilimanjaro’s highest point. We were the very last people to stand on top in the year 2002. It was New Year’s Eve and we couldn’t see a thing.

Snow and wind whirled and whipped around us making visibility non-existent. To sleep in the crater would have been madness, so we beat a hasty retreat and informed our porters they were free to descend back to Kibo.

And so the crater remained free of our footprints, and I had just about given up the idea of ever going back for a seventh time. That is until the pilot flew over the mountain and banked sharply to the side. We were so close I could see the summit sign. It was a day so clear the mountain almost touched us. In those few moments as we whooped and holstered staring out the window, it was decided: we would one day return and find out what it was like inside the mystical crater of Africa’s highest mountain.