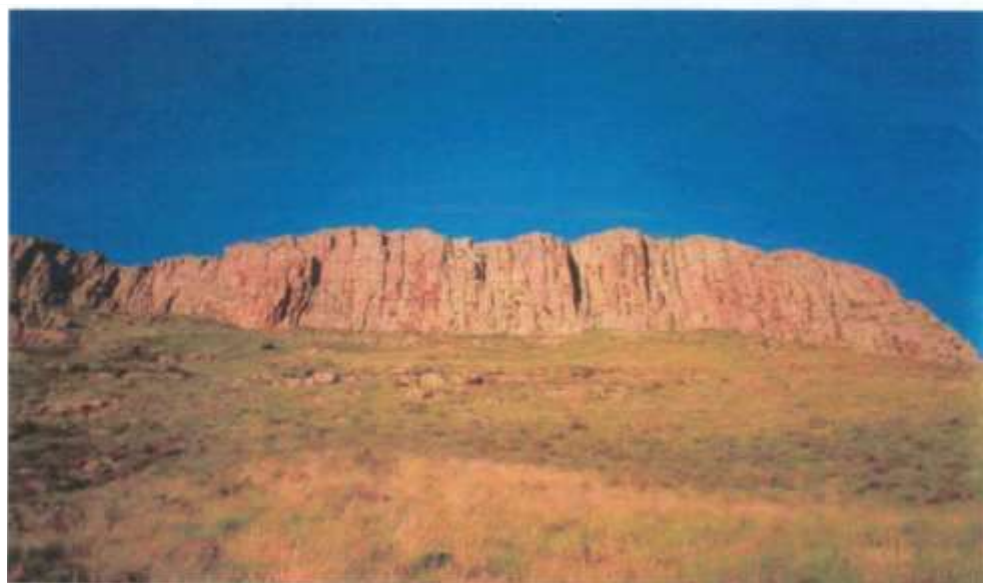


THE SHIRE



Route Guide for Rock Climbing
Jan Erasmus Farm
Tarkastad
Eastern Cape

By Gareth Frost

INTRODUCTION

My friend, Hector Pringle, invited me to his family farm out near Tarkastad in the Eastern Cape in December 2000. He had just completed his Matric and we had set out on a Cape climbing trip a week earlier. This was to be the final leg of the journey and the farm was a great place to relax and take in some good climbing at the nearby "Mary" crag. We enjoyed a couple of days climbing at Mary and some R&R on the farm.

Looking North from the summit of Mary we saw some other interesting cliffs and being keen for new adventures swore to come back and explore the crags.

The following year was another Cape trip and this time the Pringle farm was visited again. After many problems with my Jetta the previous year, we came down in my Ford 4x4.

Hector had done some research to find out on whose farm the crags were situated. We drove out early in the morning and paid a visit to the farm on which we thought the crags were most likely to be. Here we met Jan Erasmus. A friendly Afrikaans farmer bearing the burden of much enjoyed braai-vleis and beer around his middle. He was a bit confused as what we wanted to do up on the mountain but more than willing to allow us to visit his place.

We were disappointed to learn that the crags we had indented on climbing were not on his property but on the farm to the North. He assured us that the crags on his farm were probably good enough for us to have some fun on.

We set out on the track Jan suggested to follow, heeding his warning on the severity of the road. After a couple of hours of some hectic 4x4 driving we were on our way up the final hill to the base of the crag.

We were pleasantly surprised at the quality of the rock and soon began picking off the best looking lines. The climbing proved to be really good with corner and crack systems making for nice direct lines. We killed three routes that day then made our way back down the hill, the last section had to be done in the dark.

I hope to get out there again one day and open some more routes and investigate a better access route from the farm at the back of the crag.

DIRECTIONS

The Shire is situated about 35km North West of Tarkastad in the Eastern Cape which lies between Queenstown and Cradock. Here there are many "Karoo Mesers" like Mary which is a well established climbing venue.

From Tarkastad travel on the Cradock road (R61) for about 18km then turn right towards Hofmeyer (R401). Travel on the R401 until the tar section ends then turn right at a gate and follow the tracks to the farm house. The Shire can be seen up the mountain to the south of the farm.

From the farm house a jeep track is taken towards the crag which passes through the farm and up the hill at the base of the crag. The track is quite difficult and a 4x4 is required to complete the last section. A normal bakkie can get to the base of the hill below the crag but then the walk up is quite a bit longer.

A route up to the back of the crag looks possible from the adjoining farm but this still needs to be investigated.

ACCOMMODATION

There are few places to stay in Tarkastad. There is one rather run down camp site and some B&B's in town. It would be best to ask Jan Erasmus to allow you to camp on his farm but I am sure he will invite to stay in his house.

WEATHER

The summer months are probably the best time to visit the area as the winter is cold and wet. We found that the crag, being west facing, is nice in the morning and early afternoon. We did not find it too hot either and it can be chilly in the shade even though it is a lot warmer down below.

ETHICS

Only trad routes have been opened on this crag so far but there is plenty of scope for sport routes. The possibility of bolting lines here would first have to be cleared with Jan Erasmus. Personally I would like to see more trad lines opened first before any bolting takes place.

THE CRAG

The rock is good quality with many direct lines following corner and crack systems. This is typical of this area where the rock is predominantly Dolerite (iron stone). Because this crag is west facing it tends to have little vegetation but grey lichen occurs on most of the face. As with all trad areas, be careful of loose rock.

INDEX TO ROUTES

The climbs appear in this guide from left to right as if the crag was looked up at from below.

CODE	ROUTE NAME	GRADE	KEY
GTG	GANDALF THE GIT	18	*
SS	SORCERERS STONE	20	*
DRM	DARK ROAD TO MORDOR	22	*

KEY:

- * Recommended routes with good to excellent climbing.
- ☺ Adventure routes with average to good climbing.
- ⚠ Poor to average routes or routes with inadequate protection.

DESCENT ROUTE

From the top of the crag, walk to the left hand edge at the back where an easy route down can be taken. Walk leftwards back around to the front of the crag. There is a also a scramble descent on the right hand side of the mountain.

ROUTE DESCRIPTIONS

GANDALF THE GIT (18)

APPROACH

On the left of the highest part of the crag there is a face with cracks in to the right of some red, stepped roofs. This route ascends a break in the face where two parallel cracks run up to a chimney near the top of the cliff. Start at the broken section below the cracks.

1. 55m (18)
Climb the broken section up to a large rail. Move left to the left hand crack. Climb the crack to the ledge below the chimney.
2. 25m (17)
Climb the chimney to the top of the cliff.

FA: H. Pringle, G. Frost, A. Grant 2002/01/10

SORCERERS STONE (20)

APPROACH

To the right of GTG past the large cracks and left facing corner, a section of red/grey rock is seen with two distinct, red open books leading up the cliff. This route ascends these open books. Start below the right facing open book with a roof above.

1. 55m (20)
Climb the right facing open book with a good crack in the back then move left below the roof to the base of the left facing open book. Continue up the corner to below a roof. Move right, with care, across a large flake to the face. A powerful move up gains a good hold which is used to climb to the grassy ledge and belay.
2. 25m (15)
Climb the broken face on the left of the ledge to the top of the crag.

FA: G. Frost, H. Pringle 2002/01/10

DARK ROAD TO MORDOR (22)

APPROACH

More to the right of the crag, past the very big right facing corner there is an obvious right facing open book above a grey slab. Start below the corner at the bottom of the slab.

1. 15m (Scramble)
Climb the easy slab to the base of the steep corner.
2. 35m (22)
Climb the steep corner then exit left into the wide open book. Using the crack in the left face, climb up the open book exiting to the right at the top to gain a sloping ledge below an overlap in the corner.
3. 30m (20)
Follow the corner to the top of the crag.

FA: G. Frost, H. Pringle 2002/01/10

CRAG PHOTOS

