



Malawi Climbs in the Central Region

This rock climbing guide of Malawi's Central Region dates from 1988. The author is believed to be Mr H. Allen, the first lead climber on most of the routes described. It is not known if the routes have been climbed much since

A hard copy was recently unearthed in the MCM Chairwoman's attic. The discovered document was produced by an electronic typewriter; this electronic copy has been made to help rock climbers explore Malawi today.

The guide has routes in 10 places in the areas around Bunda, Nkhoma and Dedza. Many of the routes described are bolted, although needless to say, that any bolts placed nearly 30 years ago should be treated with extreme caution. Directions to climbs and routes themselves are also due for an update, and grades subject to wider opinion. The words of caution in the Introduction with respect to independence and safety are as true as ever.

If you have amendments or additions to the guide please contact George (george.margesson@gmail.com) or Drew (drewcorbyn@gmail.com) on the MCM committee.

Another historic guide - produced by Frank Eastwood in 1982 - describes routes in the Southern region and Central lakeshore. It's available on the MCM website (www.mcm.org.mw/climbing).

MALAWI CLIMBS CENTRAL REGION

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INTRODUCTION

This guide documents the increase of rock climbing routes in the Malawi Central Region through 1988. Early climbs were made near Dedza; on Potato Rock and Nambera Peak; and on Chongoni. After a long hiatus two significant climbs were made on Nkhoma. During 1987 routes were put up on Bua Mountain, Mkera, Kalichelo, and two new routes were added to Nkhoma- a significant start was made on the East face of Ngala.

During 1988 other peaks were rock climbed for the first time, including Mbalabala, Chilenje Peak, and, at last, Ngala by two major lines: Birdman and the East Face Direct. A beautiful line was put up on Mbalabala, named The Experience a test for any hardman. Other day climbs were put up on the west side of Ngala, and at Kampini Hill. Many of these routes have only been climbed by the first ascent party.

Maps provide some guidance for accessing the major areas. The approach to each climb is given, with a pitch by pitch description of the route. The route description format shows the pitch number, length and UIAA grade to the left of an indented paragraph detailing the pitch. Where reference to left or right of a climb is made it means the direction when you are facing the climb.

Malawi climbs are of a particular, perhaps unique character. The lack of a freeze-thaw cycle, or a more advantageous geomorphology climbing, has excluded cracks as a major source of protection or climbing. Instead face climbing, grass tuft climbing or off-width groove climbing are the norms. Natural protection may be found in the off-width grooves, occasionally in smaller cracks but often is won through girthing grass tufts, trees, bushes, roots and chock stones.

Bolts, the subject of a quagmire of ethical debate, have been used freely in order to provide a reasonably safe climbing environment which can be enjoyed by short-term visitors as well as longer stay, or resident climbers. Bolts are here for your safety. It is recommended that all climbers carry, and know how to use, a bolt kit.

If you get in trouble there are no helicopters to whisk one off the rocks. The Mountain Club of Malawi has a volunteer rescue corps in Blantyre, but it might take a day or more for them to reach you. This adds independence to safety as primary considerations for enjoying a climbing trip to Malawi.

There is a lack of sophisticated medical facilities. This suggests climbers avoid traumatic injuries, such as you might have in a leader fall. Wear a helmet to minimize rock fall injuries. Malawi, in 1988, lacked a consistent source of screened blood, so avoid a transfusion at all costs.

None of the climbs in the Central region require bivouac, and all can be climbed and descended in a long day starting from Lilongwe. When parking in a village one should ask permission, and when walking through gardens be sure to stay on their edge, or on an established path.

NGALA

A large inselberg some 23 kms southwest of Lilongwe, its east face has a prominent ‘smile’ shaped overhang which can be seen from the M1. According to local legend, one day a long time ago, all the mountains in Malawi convened near present day Lilongwe to discuss things with other animal, vegetable and mineral forms. The speaker for the mountains was none other than the Ngala Mouth, as it was called by the story teller. The cliff offers unusual climbing on grass tufts, with solid rock underneath, and a few sections of primarily off-width cracks.

Approaches:

- East face : From Lilongwe Old town roundabout. Take the Blantyre road 22.4 km’s to Nathenje, turn right at ADMARC. Bear left (22.8), right (22.9) and follow good earth road to a right turn at 30.8 kms.
- West Side : from the Old town roundabout take M1 for 9.4kms and turn right at the Bunda turn-off. Go left at 12.5, bend right 16.0, bend left 18.2, and bend Left 20.8, straight 23.3. go Anywhere slab 24.5 km Martin’s Crack 24.9 km.
- OR : As east face routes to 30.8 then straight to a right turn at 35.9. Follow this to (40.4 – 40.7) the cliff will be seen on the right hand side of the road.

NGALA

Northeast Slabs Route 240m 4+ ** H. Allen, P. Garland (6/87)

Approach as if to ascend by the trail up the north side and close to the large break in the face find a tongue of rock just to your left. The route is marked by three prominent trees, running diagonally from right to left, on the horizon.

- 1 45m 3 Climb straight up towards a large tree, belay on grass turfts.
- 2 45m 3 Move left 10m, then up a clean slab, using trees on the right for running belays. Move left across the slab to a small ledge and tree belay.
- 3 40m 4+ Up to and over the bulge. Continue to small tree, then traverse left to large to large tree belay.
- 4 40m 3+ Traverse left and diagonally, to the highest prominent tree.
- 5 10m 4 Take a rightwards diagonal line up the short wall to a ledge then back left to belay at small sapling. (lower bolt on pitch 6 can be used to belay)
- 6 20m 4+ Climb up past 2 bolt runners then step left and up to below the diagonal Overlap. Follow this right until able to step left over it to belay at small crack and poor bolt.
- 7 35m 4 Climb up from belay on a clean sweep of rock, using one bolt for Protection, to a tree.

Descent: By mixed grass and slabs to the right of the climb, to join the standard path.

The Flake 95m 6 ** H. Allen, P. Garland, S. Taulo (2/88)

On the right side of the east face of Ngala is an obvious flake, curving left to right. The climb begins on thin face climbing to join the flake.

- 1 5m 6 Climb up directly below the start of the crack on thin face holds.
- 2 20m 4 Continue up the face/crack passing bushes and small trees to a belay at a large tree.
- 3 40m 3+ Follow the crack which continues to curve right.
- 4 30m 2 Scramble up to large ledge and walk off.

East face Direct	250m	6+, A1	***	H. Allen, S. Taulo (10/88)
1	20m	5		Begin to the right of the small roof, off a block. Climb slightly left and up to a ledge. Step up on grass turfts straight below a prominent triangle of rock, then face climb past two bolts. At the block traverse left to the tree.
2	50m	6		Climb straight up corner crack which widens to chimney. When chimney gets to off-width size move out onto the face, following a line of 7 on necessary bolts. Join the corner and follow to top, and large ledge.
3	45m	5		Begin at the far left end of the ledge, on the other side of some stacked boulders. Make a traversing climb rightwards using bolts for protection. Reach a large flake and belay.
4	30m	3		Step over lip of flake and continue diagonalling right to left;hand corner of large roof.
5	30m	3+		Move left on a thin ledge until approximately bellow a prominent tree. Weave your way up to the tree and huge ledge using bolts for protection. The climb continues approximately 180 feet to the left, at the apex of the ledge system. A bolt belay marks the continuation of the route.
6	45m	6		Follow a line of bolt (A1), then use grass turfts on steep climbing, with Some bolts for protection. Climb towards the centre of a small roof. belay just below the roof.
7	35m	5		Pull over the roof and use rickety ladders until reaching easier ground.

Descent:

Birdman 150m 6+, A1 *** H. Allen, M. Lancaster (3/88)

Around the corner (left) of the smile is a long left facing corner. Birdman ladders can be seen below this crack, and to its left. Park approximately 1km pasrt the start for the East Face direct, at a village. Follow a path up to a slab below the corner.

- 1 40m 6- Traverse right to where the ladder begins. Climb up tufts and ladder (A1), past a bulge, to the bottom of the corner (several bolts in place).
- 2 30m 5+ After a thin start, pass a small tree, crack widens for good jamming. belay at a solid tree.
- 3 25m 6+ Crack widens, becomes very steep then narrows, requiring tenuous stemming technique, protected by bolts. Struggle up to belay at a ledge.
- 4 30m 5 Move right to right facing corner and climb up to belay.
- 5 30m 4+ Continue on face, and tufts to poor belau at a small bush.
- 6 45m 4+ Move right then up, and traverse far left to end of climb.

GO ANYWHERE SLAB

To the west of Ngala main peak is a smaller inselberg.

Facing Bunda is a large clean slab. Several lines have been top top roped on this slab, which as its name implies is climable all over by anyone with either a long neck or a long top rope. It can provide pleasant climbing at any standard and is probably the nearest climbing to Lilongwe. One line has bolt runners.

Five Bolts In A Mountain 4 120m *** M. Lancaster (09/88)
First Lead H. Allen (12/88)

Takes a direct line, more bold than difficult, up the slab passing a tree in the middle of the face. Unfortunately the tree is some 60m from both the ground and the top necessitating an usual belay technique. Start below and slightly left of the tree.

- 1 40m 3 Straight up a lighter coloured water streak for 20m to a bolt runner at a Slight depression, below an obvious shelf-like recess.
- 2 20m 4 Climb on the right of the groove then continue up to the tree passing a bolt.
- 3 40m 3 Straight up the slab behind the tree, belay at the second bolt, bring Second bolt, bring second up to the first bolt.
- 4 20m 3 Continue to tree belay.
- 5 40m 2 Continue easily up slab trending right, to Vellozia belay.
- 3a 60m 3 Follow the natural flake line diagonally right to the top.

Descent- walk off to the right.

Crow's Nest 70m 4 H. Allen, M. Lancaster, S. Taalo (10/88)

Approach : To the right of Go Anywhere Slab is a curving chimney crack.

- 1 35m 4 Climb into chimney to crux at a small bulge, where the face is climbed, to a belay.
- 2 45m 3 Follow line, thwn scramble past trees to the top.

Continuing right other easy climbs can be found up the cracked slabs. Above and right of Go Anywhere slab is a vegetated expanse of rock with a wide crack leading to an overhang. Right of this is a white corner/groove line at its right hand end. Joining the corner from the left is a diagonal crack. (This is best seen from km 24.9)

MKERA ROCK

Approximately 30km south of Lilongwe, just north of the Nkhoma turn-off is a prominent rock, to the west side of the road. Take the dirt road marked "Kamphata 1km" and park in a village on the left side of the road, within obvious sight of the rock. Walk to the two routes on the north side.

Shadow Line 5 60m *** H. Allen, S. Taulo (4/87)

The line of least resistance is found about midway on the face, directly under large rock pockets.

- 1 15m 4+ Climb directly up the face (2 bolts) to large rock pockets. Belay at the top most pockets at a two bolt stance.
- 2 45m 5 The crux moves are made when leaving the belay and moving onto the clean face above. The first bolt above the belay is straight up about 5m. The second bolt is slightly to the left, and the third back again to the right. After 20m the angle lessens and another 25m leads to a belay at a tree.

Ed's Welcome 5+ 60m *** H. Allen, E. Sklar, S. Taulo (11/87)

Scramble up boulders towards the left side of the face to where a rounded nose comes down, to the right of a black streak. After the first difficult moves the standard drops off considerably.

- 1 45m 6 Begin just left of the nose with a start on thin face moves. Move right past 2 bolts (crux) to a short diagonal weakness. Continue straight up the face, passing one bolt to a belay at the triangular block.
- 2 15m 2 Climb straight up to the top.

Descent via the west shoulder of the face, a passage long used by Africans.

CHILENJE PEAK

Mountaineer's Route 200m 5+ *** H. Allen, A. Taulo (8/88)

Protection: First pitch 7 bolts, plus 2 bolt anchor. #8 hex useful at first belay.

Adventure peak bagging route, with challenging first pitch.

Approach

From Lilongwe take M1 towards Blantyre to the Nkhoma turn-off. At ** kms find right hand turnoff to Chigoti First Primary School. Stay on the road for 6 kms until squarely in front of a large slanting protrusion of rock, Chilenje Peak. Park on the road.

Follow a trail into the village but move right through it to the fields behind. Ascent towards centre of peak. Climb begins just to the left of the steepest part of the face, just left of a steep ramp.

- 1 50m 5+ Start face climbing diagonally right up a slight groove to a bush. Traverse just below bush continuing up and right to a bolt. Follow thin ramp towards centre of face and a bolt. Move right of bolt up to small pocket. Continue climbing until reaching a stance on a grass tuft, at a bolt. Follow the line of three bolt on delicate moves to better stance (crux). traverse right past tree into chute. Climb up to belay.
- 2 50m 3+ Follow groove/weakness up and left, continue until climbing eases and belay up and behind a large tree with a hole through its roots.
- 3 50m 4 Continue following groove left until it becomes steeper again. Climb the groove, using one bolt for protection. At the top of the groove climbing eases, belay off a small tree.
- 4 50m 2 Stay to the side of steeper climbing, following ramp up and left.
- 5 20m Scramble up to the top

Descent: From the summit block one can go west through tall grass, heading back towards the village below.

NKHOMA

Following the road to Nkhoma but take a left before actually reaching the main part of the mission. Follow this to an intersection, and park just beyond it. Follow a track up towards the main mountain and after about 15 minutes turn right on a small path. This leads up the hill and winds towards the main peak, Reach the plateau and the brick retreat house. Go behind the retreat and move left towards the gully which splits the rock ridges.

For either the left side or right side follow the trail towards the gully, and break off depending on route choice. For the left bushwack straight for the obvious cleft to the right side of the peak. For the oven walk around the main peak on the right, keeping close to the wall, where you will see the climb on the opposite side.

Standard Route, Left Side xxm 3 *** father A. Radovani (5/83)

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---|---|
| 1 | 6m | 2 | When already beginning up the gully see an arrow painted on the rock wall to the left. Follow a ledge around to the left, to a belay at a tree. |
| 2 | 10m | 3 | Climb a short wall to the left and continue traversing further left to a belay at a tree. |
| 3 | 20m | 3 | Climb straight up slabby section, past bushes to a belay in a hole. |
| 4 | 30m | 3 | Continue up ridge which becomes more defined. |
| 5 | 40m | 3 | Continue up ridge to where it narrows, and steepens, reach up for bucket holds to pass difficultly. |
| 6 | 30m | 3 | Follow ridge, weaving through fantastical rock spikes. |
| 7 | 20m | 2 | Continue up ridge to summit. |

Descent: Climb down off summit and gully to the left side of summit.

Standard Route, right Side xxm 4 *** Father A.Radovani (5/83)

On the west side of the mountain, between the two peaks there is a large dome shaped slab of clean rock slab on the hillside above the road.

Approach: as for South Peak to fork at 9.2km. Turn left and park below the slab at an area of grass 12.6km.

Chabwino 85m 4 ** M. Lancaster, Finishon (11/88)

1 10m 2 Climb a crack in the front face of the boulder to a belay on the top.

2 30m 3 Move across and follow the crack line passing trees to belay next to blocks at the highest tree.

3 45m 4 Take the black groove leftwards to the top.

Note: Finishon lives in the village below and left of the base of the climb. He would probably be happy to repeat the route.

Other lines of a reasonable standard have been top-roped on the face. These await repeats, bolts or a bold leader.

Descent: use gullies to either side.

MBALABALA PEAK

The Experience 250m 6+,A1 *** M. Lancaster, R. Speller, (8/88)

Superlative route, on good rock, with fantastic situations.

Approach Route

- Pitch 1
(40m) Begin about 20 feet right of the corner, and make a traverse back to the corner. Continue straight up to the obvious narrowing in the chimney. The first ascent party then used an ingenious 'cheater stick' to place a #3 friend high in the crack. Step out right onto the face then back left. A short off-width section leads to a belay at a tree (5.7).
- Pitch 2
(45m) Pass through several trees, staying out of the corner, until breaking out onto a clean slab with very enjoyable climbing. Climb to the top on the slab and belay at a tree (5.7)
- Pitch 3
(20m) Step down from the tree and out onto the face. A thin line of small steps and hand holds leads across the slab. Be careful of getting too high. The far end of the traverse reaches a small scoop, climb up then back left to a bolt belay (5.4)
- Pitch 4
(30m) Delicately climb a zig sagging line following a vine up crack to a bolt just below the wall (5.7) step up and begin aiding the traversing crack line to the right. After a difficult start placing pieces in the crack at the roof (A2) an easier crack splits the face of the main slab. Finish on small nuts to a tree. Pass below the tree, and around slight corner to bolt belay.
- Pitch 5
(15m) The Tiltyard Pitch follow a line of 10 bolts in a spectacular traverse of the headwall itself. Two bolts over the corner lead to a two bolt belay.
- Pitch 6
(20m) Climb up left of the vegetable crack to a bolt (no longer) below loose flakes (dangerously perched above the belayer). Move onto face and continue traversing right, then up to a second bolt. Continue up to ledge and belay (5.7).
- Pitch 7
(20m) climb a steep, clean groove with fantastic friction (5.9+), stepping out right in lieback fashion. From this belay choose either the original or the direct finish.

ORIGINAL FINISH

Pitch 8 Climb right from the belay up the slab, passing a bolt.
(25m) At the skyline climb up for 3m to ledge and belay at a tree.

Pitch 9 Finish on difficult crack behind belay. Exit awkwardly and follow slab to top.
(20m)

DIRECT FINISH

Pitch 8 Continue straight up from belay using two bolts, and use large nut for aid
(A1). Continue up tricky crack (5.8) until reaching a large, and belay at a tree.

Pitch 9 Follow crack to stop (5.7)
(10m)

Descent

CHONGONI

Approach: from Lilongwe turn off the M1 to the Katengeza CCAP Mission, park at the mission, after 5km.

Orchid Route	250m	4+	P. Sellers, R.S. Jones (1958)
1	20m	3	climb slab below obvious gully to grassy terrace.
2	30m	3	Cross terrace and make diagonal traverse until 3m from angle of gully.
3	30m	3	up slabs to left of gully on good holds to inadequate belay and small stance.
4	30m	3	Continue up slab to angle of gully to reach a good belay.
5	25m	3	Up left hand side of gully to fair belay and stance.
6	15m	3	Traverse diagonally left to the foot of the wall which lies to the to the right of a prominent tree.
7	12m	4+	Vertically up from stance 4m, then traverse upwards to large ledge behind tree and good belay (crux pitch).
8	25m	4+	Leave ledge by depression at back, then traverse round nose on the left to face. The easiest way is to continue traversing for 6m and then straight up a delicate slab to stance and belay under prominent overhang. Alternatively one can climb directly up to the stance.
9	30m	4	Traverse to the right for 3m to slight overhang where gully comes down. Reach up for good jug handle for left hand, pull up and follow gully to stance.
10	20m	2	easy climbing up buttress on left.
11	20m	2	Continue up buttress.
12	5m	4	At the top is a small wall on right hand side. A hard mantleshelf, then scramble to the summit.

Descent: Carry on along ridge down to a large block (about the size of a house), and pass underneath this from the right hand side, then follow gully down to foot of rocks.

KAMPINI HILL

A hill just west of the M1 behind a school. Some 14kms north of the western Dedza turn off (GR 6285/8416).

Lazy Day Crack 5 ** M. Lancaster, S. Taulo, H. Allen (12/88)

Takes the crackling facing the school. Start below and right of the square-cut roof.

1 20m 5 Climb the crack to a tree belay.

Descent: By abseil or walk off the back.

POTATO ROCK

Approach: Turn off the M1 just north of Dedza at the map ref. 407099 and then left onto the S25. Potato Rock can be seen clearly on the right, standing on its own. Dedza sawmill is a little way further along also on the right.

There are three recorded routes to the summit.

Route 1 2-3 *** F. Kippax, J. Crossley (xx/xx)

1 xxm 3 Climb a gully over a series of blocks. At the top leave this on the left and climb an easy slab to a large protected ledge. Up the short face to the summit.

Route 2 xxm 4+ P. Sellers, J. Crossley (xx/xx)

1 xxm 4+ On the opposite side to Route 1, the route goes up between the main Wall and a large flake, then awkward climbing leads to the large protected ledge of route 1.

Route 3 xxm P. Seller (Top-roped)

1 xxm 5+ A little further round counter clockwise, than route 1 is a diagonal traverse ascending to the right of a block leaning against the face. Climb to the top of the block and up the face to the summit.

Descent: One man off one side, he anchors, the other off the opposite side.

KALICHELO

Some 15kms southeast of Dedza, at the intersection of the M1 and the S22 (Golimoti) roads, a large rock dome can be seen in the southeast quadrat.

Approach: Turn from the Blantyre road onto the Golomoti. At 0.8kms fork right onto an earth road and follow for approximately 1.5kms to park in village. A broad path skirts below the main face of Kalichelo. Descend to this and follow until a faint path branches left and contours round the hillside. You are bound to miss this first time. If so back the hill till you meet it. Follow until below the line then up to it.

Flying Snake 165m 6+, A1 ***

H. Allen, M. Lancaster (11/88)

Takes the prominent diagonal line in the white wall south of and set back from the main Kalichelo face. The first four pitches give good climbing on a striking natural line. Start on a ledge below and left of the crack.

- | | | | |
|---|-----|----|--|
| 1 | 15m | 5+ | Climb up and right to a tree at the bottom of the crack. Follow the wide crack past bushes (sometimes nettles) to a bolt belay below the last bush. |
| 2 | 20m | 6 | follow the crack (1 bolt runner) to belay bolts. |
| 3 | 40m | 4+ | Continue in the same line, pass one tree and belay above the second. hard sustained climbing, well protected by bolts. |
| 4 | 30m | 5 | The crack easier now past a tree in a wide section then an open corner to a small ledge and poor belay. |
| 5 | 25m | DD | The first ascent stuck doggedly to "The line" and forced a way up the vegetation above to a tree belay on grassy ledges. (DD = Disgustingly Desperate)
(A possibly more attractive but less direct option would be to traverse right into the right hand crack line and up what looks like easier ground) |
| 6 | 35m | 3 | Left from the tree along sloping grass ledges to line of weakness protected by Vellozias leading to the top. |

NOTE: The first two and a half pitches of this climb had been climbed before. Probably by F. Eastwood and/or R. Baines.

Descent: Well to the left looking at the face.

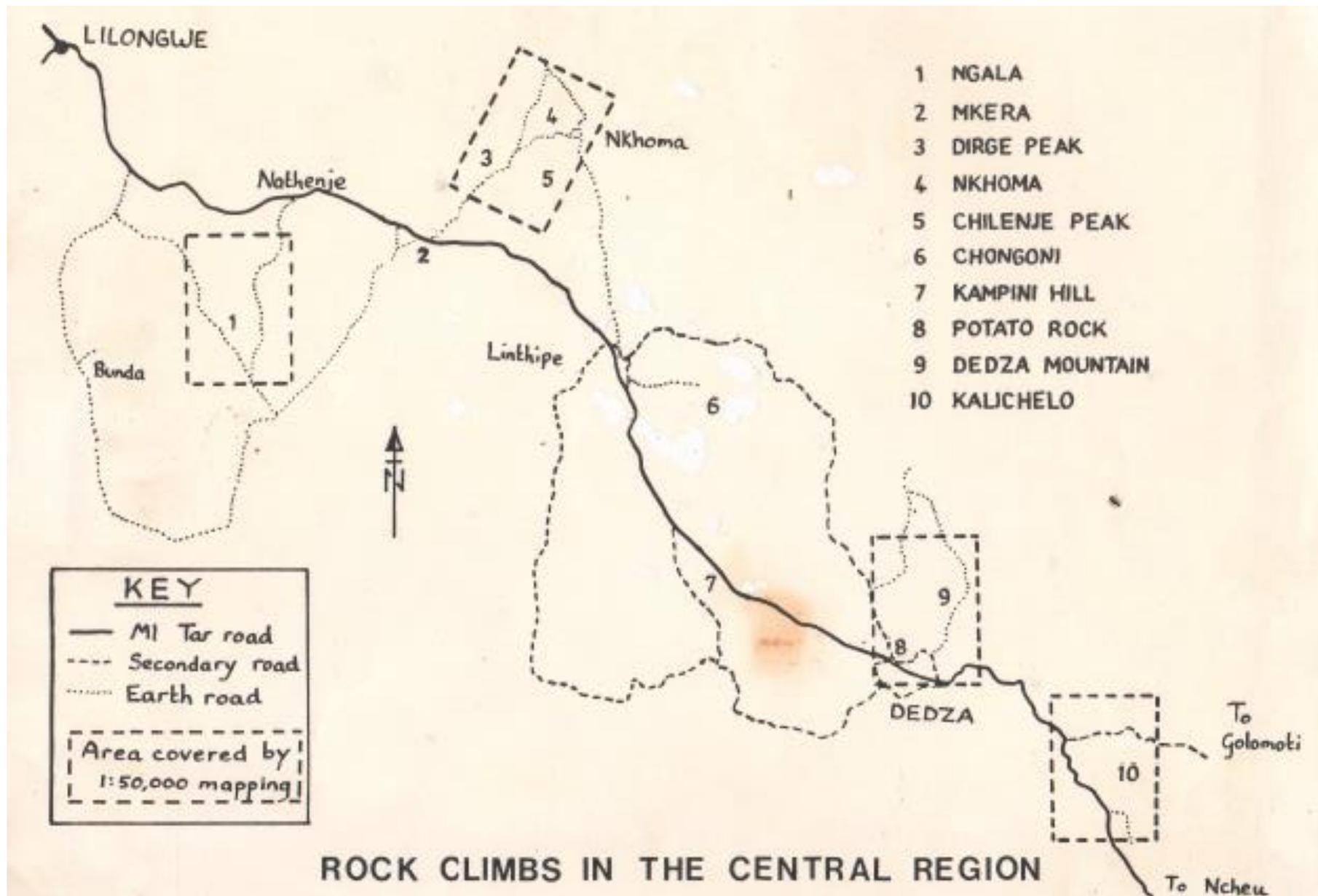
BUA MOUNTAIN

Bua Ridge Route 80m 5 ** H. Allen, D. Davis (7/86)

Approach: Approximately 100km north of Lilongwe is the Ngala forest, adjacent to the M1. An obvious 'thumb' of rock sits atop the southern portion of the main mountain. Hike up the slopes of the mountain to the left-hand corner of the rock outcropping where a large slab of rock leans onto a main ridge of the rock.

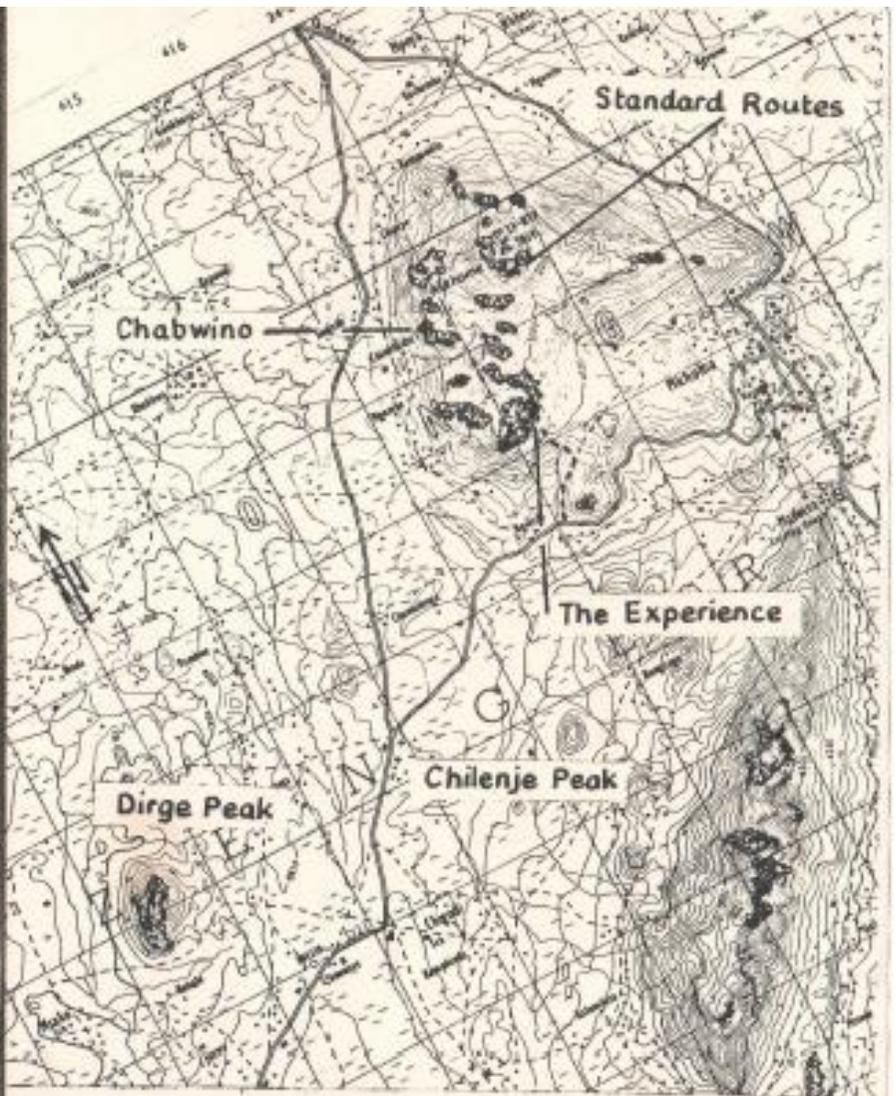
- 1 20m 3 Ascend the leaning slab to a belay.
- 2 30m 4+ traverses right and then ascend a steep section using small face holds. One piton was placed below this on the first ascent. After surmounting a slight bulge the climbing eases but little protection is found. eventually, a sloping ledge with a poor belay is reached.
- 3 30m 4 Meander up the face on easier ground until reaching a shoulder. The first ascent party walked off here. Leaving one more rope length of climbing to the very summit of the thumb.

Descent: Walk down the left side of the rock.





NGALA



NKHOMA

