

# CENTRAL BUTTRESS

475m E1 5b OR VS 4c

12) 80m (-) Easy climbing to the summit of Knight's Peak.

11) 35m (5b) **The Cracked Pillar.** The steep crack up the pillar. **Alternative)** 30m (4c) Climb the groove up left of the tower, until fine moves up the right wall regain the crest of the buttress. Finish more easily to a sling belay.

10) 40m (-) Move up easy ground then a vague gully, exiting rightwards to a stance beneath an impressive cracked pillar.

9) 35m (4b) Some steep moves then easier climbing leads to a ledge. Exit right up a final steep notch (either groove works) to another good ledge.

8) 20m (4c) Move up, then climb a short steep orange corner on the left. Continue up the rib above to a small white pinnacle.

7) 30m (5a) The difficult overhanging twin-groove above the belay provides a certain amount of exposure as the ground starts to feel a long way below. Exit onto a small oasis then make an easy but airy traverse left to a short chimney. Belay on top of a small tower (The Crow's Nest).

**Alternative)** 70m (4c) Move right from the belay and climb a steep groove to easier-angled ground. Step right to belay after 30m. From here, move up left from the belay over some questionable rock, and traverse left beneath steep ground to the base of a narrow chimney (The Fresh Air Traverse, 4b). Step down left from here, and continue traversing leftwards around the arête, passing another steep crack-line to a small stance on the left face.

6) 40m (4a) Go up slabby ground until it is possible to move right onto the excellent wall above steeper rocks. This features some delightful climbing to a spike belay at the top of Lower East Gully.

5) 50m (4b) Superb, exposed climbing up the front of the rib to a stance.

4) 50m (4c) **The Culwick Overhang.** Climb the wall to gain an obvious crack through the overhang. This is overcome with some difficulty to gain the fine ridge crest above.

**Alternative)** 50m. (-) Avoid the overhang by traversing leftwards onto a white rib, via a perched flake on the left wall. The rib leads to a good belay above and right of a large boulder in a niche.

3) (-) 25m Scramble down and move the belay up to a niche beneath a slabby wall.

2) 30m (4b) Climb an excellent narrow rib to a pinnacle belay.

1) 25m (4a) Tempting cracks up the front of East Gully Tower lead to a small ledge on the right.

**Belay 11**  
End of difficulties

**Belay 10**  
Ledge below cracked pillar

**Belay 9**  
Large niche

**Belay 8**  
Small pinnacle

**Belay 7a**  
Stance at right end of Fresh Air Traverse

**Belay 7 - Crow's Nest**  
Rock tower

**Belay 6**  
Blocks below overhanging wall

**Belay 5**  
Stance at top of arête

**Belay 4**

**Belay 4**

**Belay 3**  
Niche below black wall

**Belay 2**  
Summit of East Gully Tower

**Belay 1**  
Small stance

**The Central Buttress E1 5b / VS 4c**  

475m. Good rock and continually interesting climbing have ensured the popularity of this classic Anti-Atlas adventure. Numerous options allow the grade to be varied at will, so commitment is surprisingly low and the route is not as serious as its grade might imply.

The first ascent team of Matt Mellor and Steve Broadbent originally gained the buttress from the left via the start of the Free Blast, forging the easiest line above to create what are described here as the variation pitches. Broadbent returned the following year with Caroline Culwick to straighten out the line and leave Aylim with one of its best routes to date.

The East Gully Tower, a prominent arrow-shaped pinnacle at the foot of the face, gives a pleasant start, before the Culwick Overhang offers the first difficulty. This can be avoided via a rib on the left, but either way one ends up following a spectacular ridge up to an overhanging wall halfway up the face. Whichever way you go here it's going to be athletic – to the right, an exposed 4c groove; to the left an overhanging 5a crack. Those who took the easy way soon doubt themselves, however, as the rather crumbly Fresh-Air Traverse takes its toll on the nerves. It's best not to look down.

Interest is then maintained to a well-positioned finale at the Cracked Pillar, where another choice presents itself. The obvious crack – you really can't miss it – is steep and strenuous, and the odd questionable hold does little to reassure. The easier alternative to the left provides a good escape for those who don't feel up to an overhanging crack 1500 feet above the valley. Thankfully the climbing up the ramp and wall to the left, whilst not as photogenic, is just as good; perhaps better. At least that's what you'll tell yourself when chickening out of the crack.

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# DRAGON RIDGE

170m Severe

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6) 25m. Continue along the crest to the fine summit.

5) 30m. Easier climbing to a ledge.

4) 33m. Excellent climbing up the front of the buttress to a large ledge.

3) 25m. Climb up to a pinnacle at about 8m, then step right and move up right across the wall towards the chockstone. Steep moves rightwards past this gain the next rib, with a stance a few metres above.

2) 10m. Move the belay to the base of the pillar above.

1) 45m. Start at a very shallow groove in the side-wall, some 10m up the vegetated gully. From the base of the groove climb up rightwards across the wall on excellent holds (bold) to a stance on the arête. Continue up good rock just left of the arête, then finish up a fine sculpted ridge to a large ledge.

**Belay 1**  
Large ledges

**Belay 2**  
Back of ledge

**Belay 3**  
Stance on right side of gully

**Belay 4**  
Large ledge

**Belay 5**  
Large ledge

## Dragon Ridge **Severe**

170m. Few multi-pitch crag climbs have more to offer than the brilliant east ridge of Dragon Buttress, and for climbers operating at the Severe grade it's something of a rite of passage. The route starts, like most of the routes at Dragon Buttress, in a bush, from where the blank sidewall of the gully looks ominously difficult. A bold, rising traverse to the arête is a sign of things to come. Keep calm and carry on. Good runners arrive at a stance on the arête, where amazing sculpted jugs lead ever onwards to a big vegetated ledge and chance to regain your composure.

Having moved the belay to the back of the ledge, the next pitch provides the crux of the route. Launch off a pinnacle and scamper rightwards towards the chockstones in a position of growing peril. A stylish swing across the void is then all that is needed to gain the subsidiary buttress on the right, where a well-positioned stance provides respite. What was all the fuss about?

The way above is obvious, and to those who made light work of the last pitch, should provide little difficulty. Exposure continues to grow all the way now, as the route culminates in tremendous climbing up the crest of the buttress. Sooner or later you'll land on the exposed belvedere on the top of the crag, which provides a perfect spot for lunch.

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# LABYRINTH RIDGE

800m VS 5a

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Labyrinth Ridge AD+VS 5a 3 TOP-50



800m. There are some routes that seem to get better and better the longer it is since you climbed them. *Labyrinth Ridge* is one of them. Long after aching limbs have stopped aching, and memories of loose rock and getting hideously lost have faded, this route stands out as something special; a full-on adventure in which 20 pitches and 800m of climbing blur together into a haze of quartzite ridiculousness. Somehow, in amongst all of that, you found your way up one of the biggest pieces of rock in the Anti-Atlas.

The first ascent was made by Steve and Katja Broadbent in 2008, when heavy rain and gales buffeted the Great Rock, creating an ominous atmosphere in which to embark upon such an adventure. Even without the rain it's a daunting route that demands respect. Not surprisingly it's also one of the most sought-after climbs in Tafraout.

The lower ridge, an easy-angled affair, makes for a pleasant warm-up. Moving quickly up this perfect white quartzite you'll soon arrive at the Watchtower, where things begin to get more interesting. A steep crack from behind the Watchtower might be the first place you actually call for a rope, and above this the bold Central Ribs sow seeds of doubt. Then, after a brief walk ("what's all the fuss about?" you'll think) the headwall beckons. A steep chimney affords access to the perils beyond.

Working rightwards, doubting their sanity as much as their choice of route, most people now gain a hidden niche on the right side of the ridge. Some probably wish they hadn't, as the exit from here requires some tenuous 5a climbing up the left wall to gain a tottering rib. The heart starts pounding: images of the whole mountain falling down around you are hard to ignore. But now there is no escape, as we surrender to the whim of the mountain.

At the top of the tower, relief is overshadowed by doubt. Is this a dead-end? Of course it's not, and a short downclimb leads to a scrappy traverse left, desperate to reach the summit plateau. People go all over the place here, often ending up in hideous gullies, their epic destiny confirmed. Some clamber onto a small rock tower, covered with moss and no belays. This is the Priest, and this time it really is a dead-end.

Tension, combined tactics, and a smattering of aid (shall we call it French free?) are brought out in desperation to access the overhanging crack beyond, though it can be climbed free at 5b. Hopefully, of course, it's still light at this point because after extensive scrambling above there's still the final chimney pitch to contend with, right below the summit plateau itself. Moroccan beer will never taste so good...

E) Sustained scrambling and walking over false summits, with a few short pitches leads to a final tricky chimney right below the main summit.

D) Traverse left past vegetation to gain easier looking ground. This eventually leads to an even more unfortunate tower, with apparently no escape (The Priest). The tower is separated from the main face by a gap of about 2m, and ingenuity must be used to gain the wide crack in the wall behind. This can be free-climbed strenuously at about 5b, but some pulling on gear makes the move a little more approachable (A0 & 4c).

C) The headwall is tackled trending rightwards initially, to a hidden belay in a vegetated alcove after a couple of pitches. The left wall out of the alcove is the technical crux of the route, with some good 5a climbing in a superb position. This gains an unfortunate tower, forcing a traverse leftwards.

B) A steep pitch from the notch is a sign of increasing difficulties and growing commitment. The Central Ribs offer a variety of options, but feature some bold climbing on suspect rock. Then, after a short walk, the ridge steepens again. Take a chimney on the left side of a narrow grey pillar, stepping left onto an excellent solid face in a fine position. This leads to the start of the headwall, at about 480m.

A) The route starts easily, gaining and following a narrow crest of immaculate white quartzite for about 4 pitches to a short steep step. This is climbed at about Severe, before more easy scrambling (now mostly on the left side) leads to the Watch Tower, with a cairn and stone shelter on its summit. Avoid the Watch Tower on its left side to gain a notch. Escape into Central Gully is possible from most parts of this section.

The Priest

The Tower

Hidden Niche

Grey Pillar

Central Ribs

The Watchtower

6) 20m (4a) Move up left, relishing perfect rock, stunning views, and easy moves to the top of a memorable climb.

5) 40m (5a) Good climbing straight up the twin cracks, getting progressively steeper to a rather worrying finish.

4) 30m (4c) Go up the fine wall above to a small ledge (possible belay). Tricky undercut moves up a left-slanting crack lead to another sublime wall. Belay on a comfortable black ledge.

3) 25m (4a) A remarkable pitch, both for its position and its simplicity. Pull up left on jugs to gain the brilliant front face of the tower, then climb a vague right-facing corner to a good ledge.

2) 25m (5a) Well-protected climbing up the slot until the left-hand crack closes down. From here bold moves lead out left to the arête, where an assortment of poor gear does little to calm the nerves. Climb the front face with trepidation to another poor stance in the groove.

1) 30m (4c) The wide crack is merely an appetizer for things to come, and leads to an uncomfortable belay beneath the obvious, intimidating slot.

**Belay 4**  
Large black ledge

**Belay 3**  
Good ledge

**Belay 2**  
Poor stance in groove

**Belay 1**  
Uncomfortable stance  
below wide slot

# SLOT MACHINE

170m HVS 5a

The White Tower Direct -  
Slot Machine HVS(+) 5a



170m. A magnificent climb at the top end of its grade. Although less historically popular than its neighbour, the *Direct Route* is every bit as good, giving a more difficult, more bold, and altogether more sustained climb of exceptional quality. Isolated areas of poor rock do not detract from what is one of Taфраout's best multi-pitch HVS routes.

The initial wide crack provides a teasing sample of things to come, but shouldn't provide too many difficulties. One the next pitch things get much more sinister, when the cracks close down at an unhelpful roof. The belayer shouts encouragement, keen to get off his uncomfortable perch as soon as possible, rushing a crucial decision – do you stick with the slot, or abandon it in favour of hard, unprotected moves on the left arête? Both ways work, eventually, having put up a good fight at this grade. Another poor stance above provides little consolation.

The reward, however, soon arrives in the form of two sumptuous wall pitches, with comfortable ledges from which to enjoy the majestic views down the Ameln Valley. Leader and second arrive at the sloping black ledge with grins across their faces, blissfully unaware that Slot Machine has one final hurdle to throw at them... The final groove system is a cantankerous beast, best tackled confidently before you forget how much fun you're having.

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# THUNDER RIB

## 4. Thunder Rib **Severe**

180m. Very good, clean climbing up to the right of the South Buttress, with good variety and excellent rock throughout.

5) 30m (-) Easy climbing up the final section of *Thunder Rib*.

**Belay 4**  
Ledge

4) 50m Climb steep white rock up the right side of the tower to gain a notch on the ridge crest (possible belay). Follow the crest more easily to easy scrambling.

4) 30m (4a) A superb pitch up the steep orange buttress, via a shallow groove on its left side. Continue to a comfortable belay ledge.

**Belay 3**  
Bush below steep buttress

**Belay 3**  
Right side of steep orange tower

3) 35m Step left at the initial steepening then make an excellent traverse up left on the second steep wall to gain easy steps up a groove on the left side of the rib. Follow this to an easy step right at a perched block to gain the crest of the rib. Excellent friction climbing then leads to a belay below the right side of a steep orange tower.

3) 30m (-) Continue up the excellent rib to belay by a bush beneath steeper ground.

**Belay 2**  
Stance below steep pale wall

**Belay 2**  
Stance

2) 45m Climb up the rib on the right side of the black slab via some good but bold moves. Belay beneath a pale steep wall.

2) 45m (4a) Continue up the excellent black rib at the left side of the slabs to a shady niche, right of the large roof. Move up, then traverse the side wall leftwards to gain the front of the fine rib. Follow this to a small stance.

**Belay 1**  
Flat ledge below black slab

**Belay 1**  
Spike

1) 50m Start from a series of ribs (the Organ Pipes), and take the central rib to a good flat ledge below a prominent black slab.

1) 45m (4b) Start up the back of a vague gully at the left side of the Organ Pipes, heading for a weakness in the small overhang above. Pull through this via a very difficult but well-protected move, then follow easier ground to a good spike belay.

## 3. Serengeti **Severe 4b**

180m. Excellent juggy climbing up the clean rib at the right side of the South Buttress. The 4b crux comes on the first pitch, when an awkward overhang must be overcome. Thankfully the protection is excellent, and things get easier above. On the second pitch the route steps up left to gain the superb hanging rib that marks the right-hand side of the South Buttress, and following this gives some excellent easy climbing on perfect rock. A final steep tower, which is thankfully harder than it looks, provides a fitting climax.

# SERENGETI