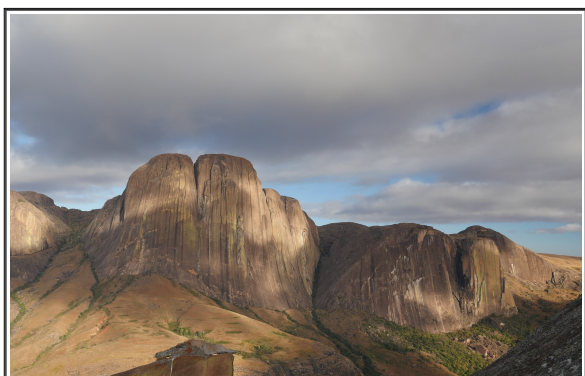


Eadan's Bouldering

I travelled to Madagascar with my heart set on developing boulders in the valley. Back home I had spent hours looking through photos online trying to find evidence of good looking boulders. I hadn't found any hard evidence so it was a bit of a gamble but it really paid off and was one of the best decisions I have made. While Calum, Robbie and Alan were scaling the big walls I explored the hundreds of boulders on the valley floor. There were more than I could ever of hoped for and they came in all shapes and sizes.

The first place I set out to develop was about a 10min walk away from our accommodation. I had found some boulders in and around a small riverbed, they were made up of very smooth river-washed hard granite and climbed very well. About a week into the trip some other climbers arrived, Josh Larson and Charlotte Durif who also wanted to boulder and on their first exploring day discovered even more nice looking boulders further down the riverbed. So together we decided to fully develop this section.



The beautiful big walls.



The riverbed bouldering sector.

When I talk to most people about Madagascar they always bring up the species of primates that are only found on the island called Lemurs. You can find around 100 different species of lemur in Madagascar and probably the most famous one the ring tailed Lemur is native to Tsaranoro. We were all lucky enough to see lots of them throughout the duration of our stay and its safe to say that we all got a bit obsessed watching them play around. One of my best memories bouldering in this riverbed was on one of the first days. I had cleaned and was trying this boulder with a hard rock over that I kept falling off. A family of Lemurs had come across and made home in a tree really close to the boulder I was on. They jumped around the branches and whilst getting more comfortable with me came closer and closer though always keeping a safe distance. They seemed to watch eagerly while I attempted this problem, letting out a few hackles here and there probably laughing at how bad I was at climbing in comparison to them. After I sent the problem and the sun started setting and they slowly wandered off back up the hillsides. Throughout the rest of my stay I would bump into the Lemurs almost every day and they became very comfortable with my presence.



A family of lemurs.



Putting on a show for the Lemurs.

My favourite route I did whilst bouldering was on the arête of this beautiful highball boulder. It consisted of slapping up the slopy edge with your left hand and balancing up small notches with your right hand and feet. The landing consisted of a sloping big boulder and a grassy mound so wasn't the nicest but managed to set up the pads quite well with a rope. I called it Ringtail and it's probably one of the best boulder problems I have done.



Ringtail from two different angles.

Together with the Lemurs the wildlife in Tsaranoro is some of the most beautiful and different I have seen. From giant caterpillars that look like twister ice creams to beautiful native palm trees. The best thing as well was that none of it could kill you. For me that was a major relief as I would most days find myself wondering through waist high grass or exploring thick jungle. I saw loads of snakes, big spiders and giant centipedes but Gillis said the worst thing that could happen would be that a spider or centipede bites you and gives you bad pain for a few hours. The worst thing that would happen to me was that the long white grass when walking through it would release these sharp thorns that would stick to your socks and turn them into a cactus looking things. This would become a nuisance when trying to clean the socks. But you cant complain when that's the worst that happens. The bird life there was also so different, you would see tiny humming birds the size of bee's around the accommodation and around the big walls yellow billed kites would use the up draft to swoop around all day. Kate also discovered crocodiles near the local village that the locals were looking after.



Giant Caterpillar.



Yellow billed kite's



Camouflaged Chameleon



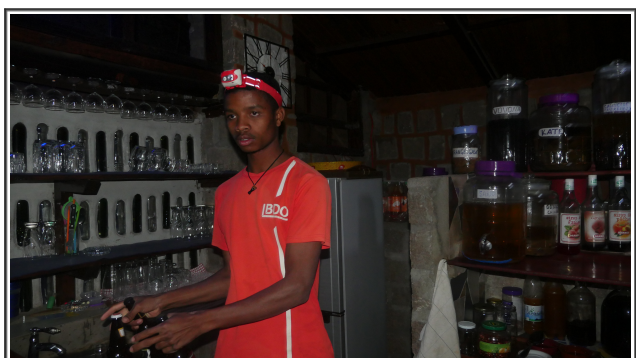
Curious Lemur

The biggest problem I encountered in Tsaranoro was the heat. Most days it was way too intense to climb in the sun and the shade of the big walls would only cover the boulders a couple of hours before dark. This meant that each day I didn't have very much time to get boulders cleaned and climbed. This produced a lot of waiting around time but I luckily had brought the complete Douglass Adams set out to pass the time. I resorted to cleaning boulders in the sun so that by the time the shade hit I could climb. This also created more sweat loss than I knew was possible. Another sad piece of information we found out was that 65% of the people living in the valley had contracted malaria. Alan found this fact even more disturbing as he had forgotten his Malaria pills and we were getting bitten a lot.



A couple more boulder problems

What made the trip for all of us even more special were the locals. I have never met such friendly, optimistic and welcoming people. They work hard all day whether it be in Tsarasoa, their villages, herding the zebu or working the paddy fields. We made good friends with a bunch of people but a couple we are going to head back just to see again. First of all I took a keen local climber called Faly bouldering and was thoroughly impressed by his skills, if he keeps it up I wouldn't be surprised seeing him developing some of the harder boulders in the valley. Also Toavina and Michelin were just awesome people, we chatted behind the bar to Toavina most nights and were even invited down to their small house and were cooked an amazing local dinner by Micheline. Big shout out to those guys.



Top Left – Toavina and Micheline
Bottom Left – Faly and Eadan in the bar

Top Right – Faly enjoying the bouldering
Bottom Right – Toavina working behind the bar