



Introduction

Table Mountain is one of the most special, unique and diverse mountains on our planet. It sits high above the sprawling city of Cape Town and offers some of the best trad climbing to be found anywhere, in a setting that is unparalleled.

There is literally something for everyone. From the steep exposed walls of The Ledge, near the upper cableway station, to the less intimidating crags of the Lower Buttresses, to the very varied climbing on the Apostles buttresses on the Atlantic side. Each crag and every buttress has its own character and atmosphere.

Often when thick cloud drapes the upper reaches, pleasant weather can be found lower down on the front of the mountain or on the Apostles. And due to the many different aspects, you will always be able to find shade or sun depending on your preference. The perfect scenario on a summer's day would be to climb on Fountain Ledge in the morning, then follow the shade over to Africa Ledge in the afternoon.

Access Issues

The Table Mountain chain running along the backbone of the Cape Peninsula falls wholly into the boundaries of the Table Mountain National Park. Therefore, when climbing on any of the crags in this book you will be climbing in a national park. However, at the time of writing, access regulations for trad climbing are not stringent and all the crags can be accessed without permit or payment. The Mountain Club of South Africa (MCSA) has gone to great lengths to keep relations between climbers and park officials healthy and amicable, allowing climbers to enjoy unhindered climbing within the park boundaries. Please behave in a manner that does not threaten this arrangement in any way.

No Bolting

Quite simply, NO BOLTING is allowed on any of the topos on this website. You may come across the odd bolt here and there, but these were placed in the days before the Table Mountain chain became a national park. There are also a few bolted abseil stations at strategic points. These were placed for safety reasons and with the permission from National Parks.

The Ledge (Africa and Fountain Ledge)

The Ledge is the 'main event' when it comes to trad climbing in the Cape Peninsula. It is a high mountain crag in a wild setting, packed with fantastic routes, many giving fine sustained and exposed climbing on good solid sandstone with mostly excellent gear. Even though there are many hard routes here, there are also some real classics that go at a very moderate grade, like the classic Staircase, Africa Crag, Atlantic Crag, Cableway Crag and the incomparable Jacob's Ladder, to name but a few. The Ledge also sports some of the Peninsula's great test pieces through the grading system. Timeless examples are Triple Indirect, Touch and Go, Roulette, The Dream, Captain Hook and Mary Poppins on Fountain Ledge, and Oddshouter's Outing, Africa Lunch, Africa Arête and No Longer at Ease on Africa Ledge. This only scratches the surface as there is a plethora of quality routes at this venue at all grades, from 10 to 32. You have not sampled the best trad on offer in the Peninsula if you haven't tickled the sandstone delights of The Ledge.

Aspect and weather

Being a high mountain crag and situated on the top north-westerly corner of Table Mountain, The Ledge does get its fair share of cold wet weather but sometimes, when the Southeaster is howling, The Ledge can be calm and offer good weather for climbing.

On clear days, you can easily choose shady or sunny climbing, by either climbing on the north-facing walls above Africa Ledge, or on the west-facing walls above Fountain Ledge.

How to get there

Park at the lower cableway station on Tafelberg Road, whether you are going to walk up or take the cable car.

Approach

Africa and Fountain Ledge is conveniently situated about 100 metres below the upper cableway station on the Cape Town and Camps Bay side respectively and is easily accessible from the upper cableway station, via various abseils. However the very popular India-Venster trail can also be followed as an alternative approach. Some care should be taken at the rock scrambles where there are chains and staples for assistance.

India-Venster trail

Park at the lower cableway station on Tafelberg Road, and from the right side of the bus parking in front of the cable station, follow the path behind the lower cableway station to reach the Contour Path. At this point it is important not to mistakenly take the India Ravine path, which goes up and leftwards. This would be the path to the Lower Buttresses. Instead, cross the Contour Path and follow the yellow footprint markers, heading right up a series of low rock steps to a platform on the skyline of the buttress. From here the route goes up the gully running to the right of Venster Buttress. Look out for the venster (window) on your left a little way up the gully.

At the top of the gully the path veers off to the left and crosses over the top of lower Venster Buttress. From this point one has a good view of the upper part of the route. The top of India Ravine is guarded by a large, broken rock amphitheatre.

Follow the path on the right side of the amphitheatre and traverse across the base of it to the left. Some moderate scrambling up and left takes you to the start of a few rock pitches on the right side of this portion of Arrow Buttress. Climb the pitches (many staples and chains), which brings you out of the small gully and on to a boulder field. Pick up the cairns across the boulders to a grassy terrace which leads leftwards to join up with Africa and Fountain Ledges beneath Arrow Final. Go left for routes starting from Africa Ledge and right for routes starting from Fountain Ledge.

Descent

There are a number of bolted abseil descents from the top of the routes on Africa and Fountain Ledges. They are all between two and three abseils and although some can be done with double 50-metre ropes, it is safest to use double 60-metre ropes. Even though the applicable abseils are described in the topos, they can still sometimes be difficult to locate, so it is advisable to go with a local the first time.

Africa Ledge abseils

1. Two abseils down the side of the Africa Crag nose to Upper Africa Ledge, then another down to Africa Ledge.
2. Two abseils down Africa Corner to Upper Africa Ledge, then another down to Africa Ledge.

Fountain Ledge abseils

1. Three abseils down the walls just to the left of Magnetic Wall. Exposed scramble to get to the top of the second abseil.
2. Two abseils (2 x 50-metre ropes) down in the Staircase area. If you have 2 x 60-metre ropes, then you can do this in one abseil.

Note: If you have a large party, or would rather walk down to the base of the routes, then proceed as follows.

Fountain Ledge descent – 20 to 30min

From the top cableway station, take any of the many paths heading east away from the station towards Platteklip Gorge (signs). The Front Table is separated from the rest of the mountain by a small valley. Platteklip Gorge is on the left and Fountain Ravine on the right.

From the bottom of the valley, go sharp right heading for Fountain Ravine. Follow a slightly bushy path for a while past a small concrete pump house. Continue along the path, keeping right, against the side of the valley passing a metal sign saying 'This is not an easy way down'. Do not drop down into Fountain Ravine! The path is narrow in places as it traverses below ever-steepening rock walls. Finally you will pass a deep chimney and pop around the corner onto Upper Fountain Ledge at its far right-hand end. Continue along beneath the Staircase Area and descend some small rock steps to a lower level. This carries on, passing the Cobblestone Gendarme and the Magnetic Wall Area, eventually turning another corner to reach the start of Africa Ledge.

Lower Buttresses

The Lower Buttresses on the front of Table Mountain is home to some of the most climbed classic routes on the whole of the Peninsula. Climbs like Fraser's Arrow and Bombay Duck are two good examples. The short approach makes for great after work climbing on a summer afternoon.

The rock and the climbing

Most of the climbing is on good sandstone. There is a great selection of moderate routes to choose from and, although not generally very steep, these buttresses do also yield some hard demanding routes.

Arrow Buttress (left)

Aspect and weather

The east wall on the extreme left of Arrow Buttress goes into the shade from about midday so it is ideal for summer afternoons or winter mornings. It can however become quite blustery when the Southeaster blows.

How to get there

Park at the lower cableway station on Tafelberg Road.

Approach – 45min

Follow the path behind the lower cableway station to reach the Contour Path. Turn left here and follow the Contour Path for about 10 minutes to reach the base of Africa Ravine. You will see the start of a vague path just after the second short metal pole (the crag can be seen now high up on the right). Take this path and follow it up the ravine, encountering a few easy rock steps, until more-or-less level with the base of the huge white prow on the right, which is the left edge of Arrow Buttress. Walk across to the base of the route.

Approach topos and descriptions come with each route topo

Descent – 15min

From the top of the buttress, walk and scramble left into Africa Ravine and down this to the base.

Descent topos and descriptions come with each route topo

Arrow Buttress (front)

Aspect and weather

The front of Arrow Buttress gets sun for most of the day, only going into the shade from mid- to late afternoon. It is a place to avoid on very hot days.

Approach – 35min

Follow the path behind the lower cableway station to reach the Contour Path. Cross straight over onto the India-Venster route and almost immediately look for a vague path leading out to the left beyond a low pile of stones. Follow this path up into the bowl of lower India Ravine for about 15 minutes till you reach an obvious scree beside a little indigenous forest. Kit up here and leave your packs under the trees. Cross the scree to the right side of Arrow Buttress at a long rock shelf. Walk along this shelf and onto the front of the buttress.

Descent – 30min

Walk off to the right and scramble into the ravine on the left side (facing out) of the buttress. Continue down to the top of the black waterfall and keeping to the right (facing out), step across where the top of the waterfall meets the buttress to find the bolted abseil station. One 20m abseil takes you to the foot of the waterfall. From here scramble down over the scree, to your packs in the trees.

Venster Buttress

Aspect and weather

The whole wall on Venster Buttress is east facing and gets shade from about midday onwards. It can however become quite blustery when the Southeaster blows. Climbers normally base themselves on the rock platform below Bombay Duck.

Approach – 35min

Follow the path behind the lower cableway station to reach the Contour Path. Cross straight over onto the India–Venster route and almost immediately look for a vague path leading out to the left beyond a low pile of stones. Follow this path up into the bowl of lower India Ravine for about 15 minutes till you reach an obvious scree beside a little indigenous forest. Continue up till almost at the base of the waterfall, then traverse right along the base of Venster Buttress to the rock shelf at the base of Bombay Duck.

Descent – 20 or 40min

There is a bolted abseil station at the top of Bombay Duck (2 x 60m ropes), which takes you straight back down to the tea ledge. Alternatively, walk left into India Ravine and skirt the top of the waterfall to a bolted abseil station on a rock platform on the right (facing out) of the waterfall (1 x 50m rope).

The Apostles

The Apostles (Atlantic side) of Table Mountain have a very different ambience to their relatively close neighbour, The Ledge, as they lie at a much lower altitude, and consequently have a somewhat friendlier feel. With sweeping views of the Atlantic coastline at all times, the Apostle buttresses are a great venue for mid-length trad routes (4 to 6 pitches) of moderate to mid-grade routes.



The rock and the climbing

Although generally of good quality, the Apostle Buttresses do have the odd patch here and there of less than perfect rock, but this should not in any way deter you from sampling some of the finest climbing on the mountain. The climbing itself is very variable, but on the whole not very steep. Routes typically involve crack and face climbing, often with exciting traverses. Most of the buttresses dry out quite quickly after rain.

Aspect and weather

All the climbing on this side of the mountain, with a few exceptions that will be covered under the individual sections, is west facing, meaning morning shade until about 1 pm. Although facing the incoming frontal systems that sweep in off the Atlantic, most of the buttresses are at times spared the bad weather because of their low altitude while The Ledge, at the top of the mountain, is getting lashed with rain.

How to get there

The Contour Path on this side of the mountain is called the Pipe Track and runs at an elevation of about 300 metres above sea level. Starting at Kloof Nek on the left, it passes beneath all the Apostles ending in Slangolie Ravine, which creates a very convenient platform for approaching any of the buttresses.

The first part of the approach is the same for most of the buttresses, so you will park at the top of Rontree Estate in Camps bay, regardless of where you will be climbing on the Apostles, with the exceptions of Cairn Buttress and Bee Buttress, which will be explained under their own sections.

From Kloof Nek, follow Camps Bay Drive for about 2.5 kilometres to the Fiskaal Road turn-off on the left. Take this turn and continue up, always taking the upward-tending road at the forks. You will shortly find yourself in Theresa Avenue which runs just below the top row of houses, and past a little cul-de-sac which goes up to the left, ending in a gate. Park in this area, but please do not park in front of the gate, and have some consideration for the residents.

General approach (to reach the Pipe Track) – 20min

Walk through the gate and follow the steep cement road, keeping right at the first fork and at the second fork. After the second fork, walk another 50 or 60 metres till you see a path on your left. This leads up to the Pipe Track at the start of Kasteels Poort. Take this path for Barrier, Valken, Kasteels and Postern (Champs Elysees Sector) Buttresses.

If your destination is Postern (Main Sector), Spring, Slangolie or Corridor Buttresses, then ignore this path and carry on with the road. After another five minutes or so, you meet up with the Pipe Track coming in from the left.

More detailed approach info can be found under the separate sections, which will be described from the Pipe Track to the buttress. Download the Apostles approach topo free.

Barrier Buttress and Valken Buttress

Although two separate and very different buttresses, Barrier and Valken Buttresses sit side by side and share the same approach, descent and tea cave. For this reason I have put them under the same section. Of all the buttresses on the Apostles side, these two are definitely the most popular. The climbs are of good quality, often following some impressive lines. Routes like Barrier Frontal and Valken Frontal, among others, are classics not to be missed.

Note: On the extreme left of the huge rock shelf that runs beneath the waterfall in Barrier Ravine, at the base of the abseil, you will find a perennial water drip that is good for drinking, which collects in a man-made pool built way back in the 1950s.

Aspect

West facing, getting shade till about 1 pm. Routes on the south faces and south-west corners get shade longer.

Approach – 1hr (from car)

See General approach under the Apostles for directions to the start of Kasteels Poort on the Pipe Track. Follow Kasteels Poort, which gradually rises as it traverses rightwards below Barrier Ravine and Valken Buttress, before crossing Valken Ravine. A few minutes past Valken Ravine you will see a vague path leading off to the left around a little fence. Take this path and follow it, negotiating a few easy rock steps to the lower reaches of Kasteels Buttress at a fairly big, black- and orange-streaked rock band, where the path almost enters Valken Ravine. Cross the ravine here, moving slightly down, and follow the vague path up to the huge hanging S.W. corner of Valken Buttress, then left to the foot of the buttress. Follow the path along the base of the buttress for 5 to 10 minutes to reach Barrier Cave on the left side of Valken Buttress, just before you exit the trees onto the big ledge that crosses Barrier Ravine. Dump your packs and kit up here. You are now at the base of Valken Buttress. To get to the base of Barrier Buttress, cross Barrier Ravine on the big ledge to gain the very left side at the water drip. Step down here and continue around the side of the buttress, until able to scramble up to gain the front of the buttress. Download the Apostles approach topo free.

Descent – 40min

From the top of Barrier Buttress, scramble along the side, or top of the buttress (depending on the route you have just done), then down into Barrier Ravine. Scramble down the ravine, keeping to the right (facing out), to where it steepens, then continue down carefully to eventually gain the bolted rap station. A 20-metre abseil takes you to the big ledge below, just to the left of Barrier Cave.

From the top of Valken Buttress, follow the vague path left to enter Barrier Ravine. Proceed as above.

Disclaimer

Rock climbing and mountaineering is a very dangerous activity, where you can get seriously injured or killed.

Mountains, by default, can be dangerous places and no guidebook or topo, no matter how flawlessly written, can remove the risks undertaken when venturing into mountainous terrain. Climbers should take responsibility for their own safety and for members of their party. Climbing is a high-risk sport and can cause severe injury or death. Blueline topos and its authors can in no way be held responsible or liable for death or injury resulting from the use of our topos, or the information contained on www.bluelinetopos.co.za

Blueline topos have been written and constructed so that climbers can share the superb trad climbing the Western Cape has to offer. Although every caution has been taken to ensure the topos are as accurate as possible, there will undoubtedly be errors. Please be mindful of this and use the written description in conjunction with the topo and your mountain savvy to decide the path of the climb. Users of these topos must rely on their own discretion and judgement before utilising any of the information therein. By downloading, purchasing or using any Blueline topo or utilising any information on www.bluelinetopos.co.za, you automatically assume full responsibility for your own actions and life.

Blueline topos are essentially guides and in no way should it encourage people with little or no experience to attempt climbs that are out of their depth. Blueline topos are in no way instructional and experienced climbers are strongly advised to seek the guidance of experienced climbers, or hire a guide, before attempting any rock climb.

© All rights reserved

All Blueline topos and the information contained within them are copyrighted. No parts may be reproduced by any means, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means of photocopying, electronic, mechanical recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Private property

Descriptions, approach and other information contained in any Blueline topos does not give you right of access to private land or state parks. All signs are to be observed and necessary permissions and permits need to be obtained.