

Al Hamra Towers Area

(topo and French text: Thierry Renault & Nathalie Hanriot; translation & GSM directions: Bill Huguélet)

*** En Attendant les Lents (275m, 5c/6a, TD-)

(trsl: "While Waiting for the Slow Ones")

Features: excellent rock and great views, in shade all day, 2hrs from Muscat, 40 minutes walk from car (2km, uphill).

First Ascent: Thierry Renault, free solo, 29-11-04. Belays equipped with Nathalie Hanriot 25-11-05.

Protection: Belays have one or two bolts; 1 bolt 2/3 through traverse; a couple of pitons in place. The leader needs to be competent in arranging traditional protection and not afraid to run it out 6m on pitches (vi) and (vii).

Equipment needed: 50 m rope; medium and small cams, nuts, helmet.



Approach: From Nizwa to Bahla road, turn towards Al Hamra. After 3km turn right at a brown colored sign indicating Hooti Cave and Bilad Seet. The road passes through the mountains. Turn left after a few km at a brown sign indicating Qa'ala al Masalah onto a gravel road. (GPS coordinates lat/long 23.08121N / 057.31349E or UTM 40 532108E / 2552544N) Go for a km or so. The road starts to swing a bit left when another gravel track comes in from the right. Go left here, up a track keeping a house with blue gates on your left. The track squeezes, rising, between two houses to an open area with volleyball court. Park out of the way. (GPS: 23.08323N / 057.30255E or 40 530986E / 2552765N)

A path leads across the volleyball court and up a slight rise, then along and above a valley to your right. It peters out after 300m or so. Turn sharply right up a loose hill to get around the head of the valley. Cross a small wadi and go straight uphill towards the towers. Reach a flat area in 100m. (Some cairns up to this point.) From there, make your best way up the loose and rocky slope to the left tower; there is no clear path. Seek shade. Cairns again as you approach the left tower. Follow a traversing ledge to the arête. There is a cairn at the start of the ledge. Two cairns at the end of the traverse mark the beginning of the route.

Description:

- i. **(25m, 5b)** The route starts at the foot of an obvious spur. (twin cairns) Climb several meters to an overhang with crack (5b) and continue straight above to a terrace.
- ii. **(45m, 4b)** Go straight above for a few meters then diagonally towards the right in beautiful lower angled slabs under an overhanging spur. (4b) Belay to the right on a block.
- iii. **(45m, 5c)** Go up a good obvious ramp, which runs just to the right of the overhanging spur, to a dihedral with a small bush. (Cross the Bruzzi Italian route here.) Climb a nice wall with cracks, parallel higher up. Go up the one on the right and by one move to the right and a good step, pass onto the north face. (Mostly 4c and 5a, with one 5c move higher up.)
- iv. **(45m, 5a)** Make a long traverse of 40+ meters, at first descending then climbing (5a; one bolt to reduce rope drag at 30m)
- v. **(45m, 5b)** One move to the right, then climb up to the left using tafonis (cavities in rock formed by weathering) and continue, bearing left, to an easy ramp which becomes a ledge and which you follow to the right for about 10m. The belay is found above by a crack. (5a, one 5b move).
- vi. **(45m, 5c)** Above, climb up a flared crack, shaped like the arc of a circle, until it divides in two; take the right hand one, brown and a bit steep, but don't continue it when the slope eases towards the left. (Variation to the top 4c) Traverse on slabs for about 15m to find the belay on a terrace. (Mostly 5a/b)
- vii. **(25m, 6a)** Straight above, climb a crack, somewhat uncomfortable in the beginning. Don't continue on it too far. After about 4m, go to the left on a steep wall with large holds (airy and superb) by which you reach the top.