

# Northern Kenya Bouldering Guide

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# Aberdares (Dragon's Tooth) Bouldering

While there are hundreds of freestanding boulders in the area, the rock quality is unfortunately not so good (especially up high at the Dragon's Tooth proper). It's probably not worth lugging crash pads up the brutal hike to the higher features, but additional development could be kept lower down where the rock is of seemingly higher quality.

**Getting There.** Getting to the Dragon's Tooth portion of the Aberdares is no easy task. From the town of Nyahururu, drive east about 28km until you see a dirt road on the right with small signs for the Aberderes and Shamata Gate. From there, drive 22km on the very rough road to reach the gate. You will have a left, a right, and a left turn along the way. Ask locals to ensure you are on the right path. Once at the Shamata Gate KWS station, make your arrangements. From there, continue about 10km up the Shamata Gate dirt road to the Twin Peaks parking lot (large rocky formations adjoin this spot). From here you can hike up to the Dragon's Tooth (3-4 hours, guiding recommended) or follow the directions below to the car camping spot. From that spot there are several other boulder covered ridges besides those described here that could be accessed with 1-2 hours hiking.



The car camping spot from the nearest bouldering ridge

**Area I - Car camping ridge.** Drive to the Twin Peaks parking lot and then take a grassy jeep trail on the right for about 0.5 km to a small campsite at the end of the road. Continue walking on that bearing up to the closest obvious ridge. The rock here is dusty but overall better quality than that found at the higher elevations. Exploring other nearby ridges at this same elevation could yield quality bouldering, and access is much easier than at the proper Dragon's Tooth.

**V4 Wino (\*\*\*)**. Sit start and compression climb the overhanging arete. FA Nathan Brand

**VI Beluga Barstool (\*\*)**. Stand start widely hugging the blunt arete just around the corner to the right of Wino. Slap up poor slopers to a flat ledge and slopey topout. FA Nathan Sick.

**V0 Name Unknown (\*)**. Climb the featured slab on the boulder about 50 meters uphill from Wino. FA Sealy Chipley.



Nathan Brand getting an aggressive spot on the FA of Wino (V4).

## Area 2 - Dragon's Tooth Valley Area.

Go out the uphill exit of the Dragon's Tooth caldera and look down and to the right. Across a small stream there is a low ridgeline with a collection of boulders. These chossy but decent problems are on two of the taller boulders towards the beginning of the ridge. Most boulders here are too fragile to hold quality problems, unfortunately.

**VI Dragon Dentures (\*\*).** Stand start on positive crimps and climb straight up to topout. FA Nathan Sick.

**VI Name Unknown (\*\*).** Stand start on positive arete a few feet to the right of Dragon Dentures and climb up and left to finish at the same topout. FA Blake Stanley.

**VI Incisor (\*\*\*)**. On a tall and narrow boulder just a few meters past the Dragon Dentures boulder. Stand start on crimps and climb the center of the thin slabby face on good rock to easier ground up high. This is also the downclimb for this boulder. Good landing, but tall. FA Nathan Brand.

**VI Smaug's Molar (\*\*).** Stand start with right hand on blunt arete and left hand on good sidepull. Climb the arete to a small bush and then top out to join Incisor. FA Nathan Sick.



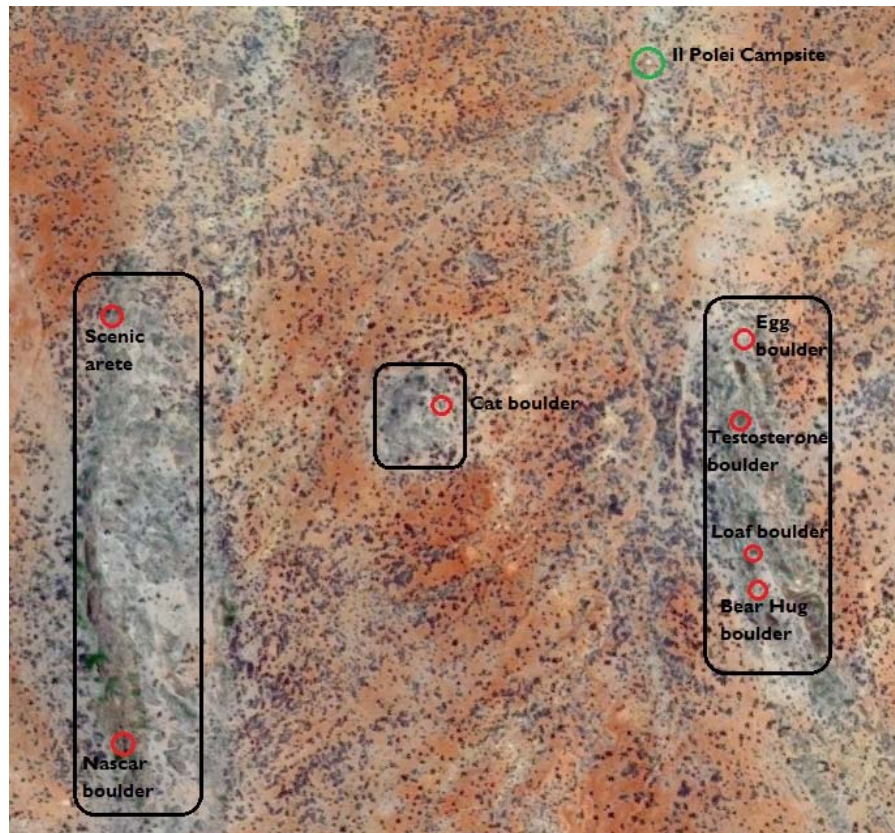
Blake Stanley topping out Beluga Barstool (VI) at sunset.



Whether bouldering or just camping, visit this place.

# Il Polei Bouldering

Of the three areas described here, Il Polei has the most potential for further development (and the most problems already established – enough for a fun weekend). Car camping and a short approach means that once the brutal offroad driving is navigated the actual bouldering and crashpad management is trivial. Some additional development is for sure possible at the hills and ridges described here, but mostly it is the other hillsides visible in the surrounding terrain that likely hold massive amounts of bouldering. The rock suffers from initial looseness and choss, but once the obvious pieces are pulled off the underlying quality is very high. There is potential for hundreds of problems within a 2-3 mile radius of the campground. Il Polei could be a legitimate bouldering destination.



**Getting There.** Getting to Il Polei would take approx. 5-6 hours from Nairobi, sans traffic and with a good 4x4. Follow Google directions through Nanyuki to the town of Il Polei. Meet up with your guide, and make the only left turn in the town. Follow that road for a few kilometers to a left turn onto a very serious offroad trail. You will need ground clearance for this one. Follow the vague road for about 1km to a dead-end amongst the cacti and right next to a twisty dry riverbed. There are signs indicating this to be the campground, and there are pit toilets nearby signifying that you are in the right spot. Bring everything you need, as water will be scarce, Il Polei is very small and Nanyuki is not very close.

**Area I - Oldonyo Olowaa Hilltop.** If you cross the dry riverbed at the campground and begin walking towards the obvious ridge you will first encounter this hilltop. It has one excellent boulder (the Cat Boulder) and maybe a few more gems lurking, but overall is lacking in potential. Climbs here get afternoon shade.

**Unnamed Boulder.** Tall, thin rectangular boulder. This is an obvious boulder on your right when you first approach the hill from the campsite. It is about 50 meters uphill from the Cat Boulder.

**V0 The Warmup (\*).** Stand start on valley-facing side and climb jugs to topout. FA Blake Stanley.

**V2 Crumblefish (no stars).** Stand start on the hill-facing side between some shrubs with a solid left facing sidepull. Climb edges and incuts to the gradual and tall topout rife with iffy flakes. This would be a decent problem with some cleaning but currently suffers from scary amounts of loose rock up high. FA Nathan Sick.

**Cat Boulder.** This is an oblong boulder that is to your left at the bottom of the hill when approaching from the campground. It holds several quality problems on the downhill side, with room for a few more.

**V2 Puss'n'boots (\*\*\*)**. Left-most line on the boulder. Sit start on positive edges and make a big move up and left to a good edge over the scoop. Top out. FA Nathan Brand.

**V2 Polecat (\*\*\*)**. Sit start on good holds and climb straight up to gradual top out, avoiding some loose holds. FA Blake Stanley.

**V4 MuscleCat (\*\*\*\*)**. About 5 meters right of Polecat. Sit start on positive crimps. Make a move up and right to a good edge and then climb tenuous slopers straight up to top out. An area classic. FA Nathan Brand.



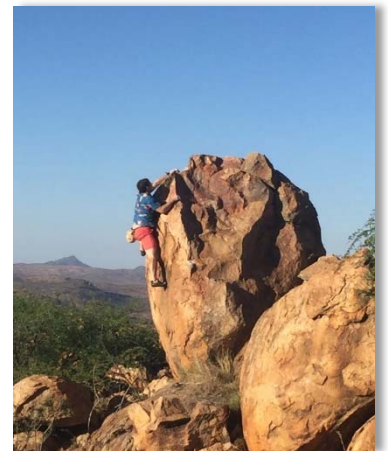
Blake "Wildcat" Stanley flexing his biceps on MuscleCat (V4)

**Area 2 - Scenic Ridgeline.** This is the obvious ridgeline past the Oldonya Olowaa hilltop and the tallest point within immediate walking distance of the campsite. It is home to two established boulders. The backside of the ridge (as oriented to the campsite) holds many tall and excellent looking problems that unfortunately are located on top of steep death slabs. Climbs here get morning shade.

**Picture This Boulder.** Tall boulder on the North end of the ridge. Home to one established problem that is mostly just good for posing for photos on, as well as one promising looking face with a poor landing. There may be other boulders worth climbing nearby.

**V0 Picture This (\*)**. Stand start on the positive but slopey arete and use good feet to climb to the top. Wear your Sunday best and have a photoshoot. FA Nathan Sick.

**Nascar Boulder.** On the opposite end of the ridgeline from the Scenic Arete Boulder. Gain the ridge and skirt the (possibly) electric fence around the backside of the boulder to find this quality piece of rock perched atop a mellow slab. Good climbs over a clean one or two pad landing.



Nathan Sick posing at sunset on Picture This (V0)

**V6 No Mercy on the Moon (\*\*\*)**. Furthest left (uphill) line on the boulder. Sit start at the blunt arete on a left-hand sidepull and sharp right-hand crimp. Climb the arete to the obvious finishing jug with wide moves and heelhooks. FA Nathan Brand.

**V4 Dirt Track (\*\*\*)**. Middle line. Sit start very low on sharp crimps. Make a tricky initial move to another sharp crimp and then climb straight up the face. FA Nathan Brand.

**V2 If It's Good Enough for 3, It's Good Enough for Me (\*\*)**. Right-most line. Sit start on the flat edge, climb crimps and slopers to the top. FA Blake Stanley.



Enjoying the view and working the wide compression moves of No Mercy on the Moon (V6)

**Area 3 - Endonyo Eshoilaa Ridgeline.** This is the closest ridgeline uphill from the campsite. It is on the same side of the dry riverbed as the camp, and is approximately a 5-minute approach. It holds the highest concentration of good boulders in the area, with room for significant additional development. All climbs here get morning shade.

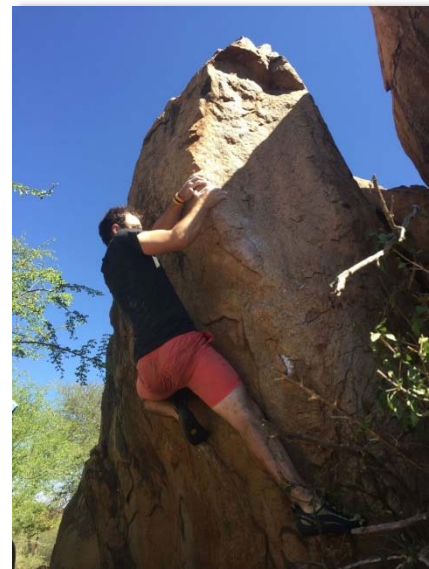
**Egg Boulder.** This is the first and most obvious boulder that you encounter as walking towards the ridge. It is home to an excellent project and one other established line, with a few other possible problems.

**V3 Bird-Up (\*\*)**. Stand start on slopy ripple crimps high on the bulge. Use bad feet to jump to the jugs and then trend slightly left to delicately top out over some loose rock. FA Nathan Sick.

**V? The Broken Egg Project.** This was an elegant V7/8 that was very nearly sent before suffering from a key broken hold. It is still doable and is likely a quality V9 (or harder). Sit start with bad feet and matched on the obvious edge with shallow thumb catches. Get off the ground and make a difficult pull up and right to a poor gaston (originally a good crimp). From there jump to the jug and then traverse left a few feet to finish on the Bird-Up topout.

**Testosterone Boulder.** This is a tall boulder low on the hill about halfway along the ridgeline. The main face can easily be seen from across the valley. The boulder forms a corridor with the adjacent boulder and trees which is where the established problems are located. Just downhill is another boulder with what should be a V3/4 lip traverse, and around the corner on the main face of the Testosterone Boulder is a highball arete climb that begs to be done.

**V0 T, Got Any? (\*)**. Left-most line on the corridor face. Climb good holds to the top. FA Blake Stanley.



Nathan Sick balancing up the post-cruix arete of Low-T (V5).

**V2 Man Juice (\*\*\*\*)**. Stand start matched on a jug. Move straight up with balancy pulls on edges and slopers. This is a fun problem. FA Blake Stanley.

**V5 Low-T (\*\*\*\*)**. Sit start low with left hand on good slanting edge and right hand on a very sharp crimp. Make a hard move to gain the slopy arete and climb the rest of the balancy arete to topout. FA Nathan Brand.

**Loaf Boulder**. Around 50 meters past the Testosterone Boulder and slightly higher on the hillside. This is a downhill facing boulder that can be identified by the obvious loaf-like rock wedged in the side of the overhanging face.

**V3 Slice of Life (\*\*)**. Start on sloping rail and loaf. Move straight up to crimps and top out. FA Blake Stanley.

**V5 Manuel's Hamster (\*\*\*\*)**. Sit start on a left-hand edge and with a right hand/heel match on the obvious ledge. Cross up to the pinch and move left to the loaf. Make a big move to a good crimp and then finish up on the same terrain as Slice of Life. Fun and natural movement. FA Nathan Sick.

**Bear Hug Boulder**. About 20 meters past the Loaf Boulder is this obvious downhill facing boulder. It is relatively tall and steep with one established line and several other possible problems. Named after the "bear hug" spot that was given when a topout hold unexpectedly broke.

**V5 Bear Hug (\*\*\*)**. Sit start on a pinch and a good edge on the left face of the boulder. Make a huge move left to a sharp crimp hidden around the blunt arete, and then top out. Height dependent for sure. FA Nathan Brand.

**V? Arete Project**. This will be a proud line somewhere in the V4-V8 range. Climbs the right arete of the boulder out to the obvious prow. Sit start on good left hand crimp and with your right hand on the best part of the arete. Use a poor blocky left hand edge on the face and right hand slopers to gain quartz jugs and pockets above. Continue to move up and left out the arete to the prow and top out. Alternatively, after the first few moves escape onto the quartz slab. Tall, but with a decently flat landing.

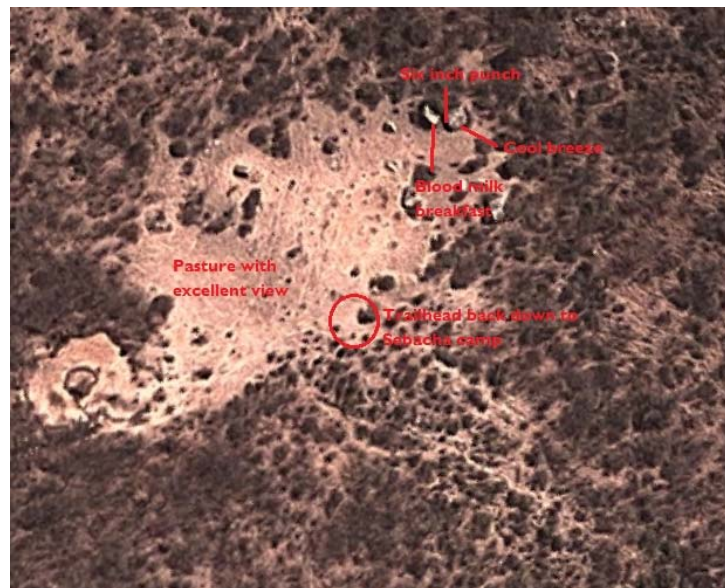


# Ololokwe Boulders

Of the three areas described here this has the highest quality of rock, with minimal choss and looseness. Getting pads to the campground is not a problem, and there are many boulders scattered on the hillsides to explore. Many more boulders are in the valley, but without trailheads they are likely difficult to access. Hiking pads to the top of Ololokwe is high-effort but worth it given the massive potential for bouldering at the summit.

**Getting There.** From Nairobi, drive north for 5 hours, following directions to Archer's Post. From Archer's Post continue on the A2 for another 20 minutes or so. Just after you pass the obvious feature that is Ololokwe, make a left turn onto a dirt road following the sign for Sabache Camp. Take the dirt road to the end (there is one fork in it – stay right, if you come to a private residence you have gone the wrong way). Give Sabache Camp your business – they are very friendly and will know what you are talking about when you say that you want to boulder.

**Sabache Campground Saddle Ridge Boulders.** This is a collection of high-quality boulders at the top of a saddle feature overlooking the Matthews range. They are accessed by having a Sabache guide take you 25 minutes uphill on the main valley trail (not the Ololokwe summit trail) from the campground and then looking right when you reach the pasture at the top of the valley. The quality of the rock is high, and there are many more boulders scattered on the hillside around the camp, although they are likely to require more bushwhacking than these easily accessible boulders. The three established problems on the two obvious boulders make for a short but fun circuit. One or two other lines probably exist.



**V6 Blood Milk Breakfast (\*\*\*\*).** Sit start with an awkward left hand gaston edge and a shallow right hand pinch. Use bad feet to make a big reach up and left to a sloping edge. From there climb the arete and top out. The sit is the most natural start, but you can stand start on the same holds in a lieback with a high foot for a V5, or start one move in at the sloping edge for a V3. This problem is on the obvious steep blunt arete on the left of the two adjacent boulders when facing them from the trailhead. FA Nathan Brand.

**V5 Six Inch Punch (\*\*\*).** Harder than it looks. Stand start matching the obvious half-pad edge on the clean overhanging face (just across and a few feet from Blood Milk Breakfast). Delicately establish on the wall and make a desperate move to the lip. Finish with a sloping mantle. FA Nathan Sick.

**V3 Cool Breeze (\*\*\*).** Around the corner on the same boulder as Six Inch Punch. Stand start matched on the sloping rail with a heelhook. Make a move to a good pocket and top out. FA Nathan Brand.

**Ololokwe Summit Boulders.** These are an impressive collection of quality boulders near the cedar grove campground high on Ololokwe. Accessed by taking the main summit trail up to the cedar campsite. From the campsite walk downhill and trend left (when facing the cliff) through a couple of meadows. Not far away is a collection of boulders clustered near the cliff and in the woods, all within a few hundred meter radius. Only two problems are described here but 20+ quality lines likely exist in this boulder field. Allow a day or two to explore.



**V4 Scrotum (\*\*\*)**. This problem would be right at home in the American Southeast. From above directions walk into the woods past some tall leaning boulders. Look for the small and unique egg-shaped boulder with distinct wrinkles running through it. Sit start as low and right as possible on mediocre edges with awkward feet. Make a move or two up to the finger jug and then top out. Several other lines are possible. Protectable with one pad. FA Nathan Brand.

**V5 Turtles all the Way Down (\*\*\*\*)**. This is a standout of Kenya bouldering and would be a classic line in any area. The first boulder you encounter is this vaguely turtle-head-shaped prow with white bullet-hard rock. Sit start on two unique crimps on the left side of the prow arete. Heelhook and cross your way rightwards up crimps and pinches until you transition from the arete onto a sloping rail on the the face. At this point move straight up on slopers and a sidepull to top out directly over the prow. Easily protectable with two pads. FA Nathan Brand.



Nathan Brand styling on the impeccable rock of Turtles All the Way Down (V5).