



# MCK Trad Learners Guide: Jacob's Ladder to The Keep

**Disclaimer:** Climbing is dangerous. We are not responsible for anything. The information in this guide might not be accurate, if you get injured or killed it's not the fault of this guide's authors or the MCK. If you're having fun, we'll take some credit though. This guide is **NOT INTENDED** to teach what a good placement is, how to build anchors, or any other basic trad/leading principles that should be taught by a mentor/ instructor/ experienced trad climber. There's also plenty of books on these topics out there. Our recommendations are below.

## **Goals of this guide:**

This is intended for beginner trad leaders looking to progress their skills - those who have learned the theory of how to place gear, build anchors, and lead, but need to know where to practice. Ideally this should be a self-directed guide to Lukenya, so that people who have spent less time at Lukenya can know where to find obscure crags that are great to learn on, as well as provide additional beta to the guidebook (gear, anchors, etc). This is a living document, so please provide feedback and comments so it's always improving!

## **Progression:**

The climbs selected in this guide are meant to allow you to safely progress up the grades in order to open up more of Kenya's wealth of climbing to you. Most of them have been selected because they are fun and have adequate protection. They are presented in a roughly linear progression. Before moving from one step to the next, we recommend having a more experienced trad leader follow you on several climbs and provide constructive feedback. If there is nothing significant to improve, then feel free to move on.

You can find out about the different grades here: <https://www.rockfax.com/publications/grades/> NB that "Difficult" is quite easy. One of the best ways to explore Lukenya and progress in the grades is to get the guide book and start ticking the D, VDs and progressing upwards. Just walk around, explore and enjoy!!

## **Standard rack of gear:**

Partner you can rely on, ideally someone with experience. At least someone who can lead belay.

Lukenya Guidebooks (sold by MCK), or <https://www.thecrag.com/climbing/kenya>

Single or double rope (60m)

1 complete set of nuts

1 of each cam from small finger size to hand size (0.3 to 2 Black Diamond)

4 quickdraws

6 x 60 cm runners with at least one carabiner each

2 x 120 cm runners with at least one carabiner each

1 cordelette/long anchor sling (2 for multi-pitch)

3 lockers (4 or 5 for multi-pitch)

Belay device (ideally, guide-enabled such as ATC Guide, Petzl Reverso, etc)

Nut tool

Helmet, harness, chalk, shoes

## **Steps:**

### **1. Practice the basics of trad climbing**

- a. Notes: Seek guidance through formal training or books that you'll read from cover to cover.



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- b. Locations:
  - i. At home
  - ii. In the broken rock under the overhang to the left of Cakewalk Face
  - iii. Among the boulders to the right of Main Wall parking
  - iv. Anywhere else with plenty of cracks and features at ground-level
- c. Practice gear placement and anchor building on the ground. Receive feedback on your placements by bounce testing and review from an experienced climber.
- d. Milestones:
  - i. Do I know what makes a good and bad gear placement?
  - ii. Can I set up a safe anchor using 2 bolts? 3 pieces? Trees? Boulders?
  - iii. Do I know how to safely belay my second from the top of a climb?
  - iv. Do I know how to rig an abseil and safely descend?

### **2. Mock leading**

- a. Notes: If climbing as party of 2, use partner to belay on top rope and climb with a flaked lead rope. If climbing as a party of 3, use second partner to belay on lead rope as well.
- b. Locations: Boulder Crag, The Cemetery - Cemetery Corner, Jacob's Ladder
- c. Milestones:
  - i. Is my gear solid and do I have enough of it?
  - ii. Did I lead efficiently, with minimal time spent placing gear?
  - iii. Is my rope path linear, with minimal rope drag?
  - iv. Did my second evaluate my gear as secure?
  - v. Did I hesitate or doubt myself during any part of the full process? If yes, I should go back and practice until there is no doubt.

### **3. Easy single pitch leading**

- a. Notes: For leaders who feel confident in their gear placement, anchor building, and rope management. All of these climbs are very well protected and are physically very easy, with plenty of opportunities for no-hands rests so that the leader can focus on gear and systems.
- b. Locations:
  - i. Boulder Crag - Boulder Original (D) - 20m, gear anchor, walkoff climber's left
  - ii. Jacob's Ladder Face - Jacob's Ladder (D) - 30m, tree anchor, walkoff climber's right
  - iii. Cakewalk Face - The Cakewalk (D) - 30m, tree anchor, walkoff climber's right (great practice for using long slings to minimise rope drag as the route meanders)
  - iv. Sentry Box Crag - Sentry Box (D) - 30m, gear anchor, walkoff climber's right (protection is spaced out)
  - v. Sentry Box Crag - Boomsling (VD) - 30m, gear anchor, walkoff climber's right
  - vi. Main Wall - Bandstand 1st pitch, only to bolted anchors (D) - 35m, bolted anchor, abseil with a 70m rope or slanting climber's right with a 60m (tie knots!)
  - vii. Main Wall - Arthur's Horror 1st pitch to bolted anchors, starting from ledge to the right of the start of Bandstand (climbing up the abseil line) (D) - 30m, bolted anchor, abseil to the



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same ledge (70m rope ideal, but 60 will make it if you're heavy! Don't forget stopper knots)

- viii. Archway Crag - Direct Route (crack) (VD) - 25m, bush anchor (or continue to ledge for a thread anchor, then walkoff right)
  - ix. Main Wall - Pier 1st pitch (VD) (layback crack to right of Bandstand) - 35m, bolted anchor, abseil with a 70m rope or slanting climber's right with a 60m (tie knots!)
  - x. Cemetery Crag - All the VD climbs on the left side of the crag. Easy descent via big tree on the edge.
- c. Milestones:
- i. Was every part of the climbing process as safe as possible?
  - ii. Did I hesitate or doubt myself during any part of the full process? If yes, I should go back and practice until there is no doubt.
  - iii. Before moving on, have an experienced trad leader second you on a few climbs. Solicit as much feedback as possible, and only continue when there is nothing significant left to improve.

### 4. Easy multi pitch leading

- a. Notes: For leaders who are confident and efficient in single-pitch leading, and are well-versed in anchor building. These routes are physically very easy, so the focus should be on proper communication, belay management, transitions, and safe descent. Lukenya does not have climbs that are more than 2 pitches, so a viable method is to split climbs into many shorter pitches in order to practice transitions.
- b. Locations:
- i. Archway Crag - Direct Route (VD) to the top of the crag in 2 pitches - 40m, tree and rock pillar anchors, walkoff climber's right
  - ii. Main Wall - Arthur's Horror (S) - 2 pitches (or more as desired), 60m, bolted or block anchors, abseil from bolted anchors
  - iii. Main Wall - Bandstand (D) - 1st pitch to bolted anchors, splitting into 2-3 pitches (the second pitch of Bandstand is quite runout), 35m, bolted anchor, abseil slanting to climber's right with a 60m rope (tie knots in the end!)
  - iv. Main Wall - The area of rock between Arthur's Horror and Colin's Caper, up to the first big ledge of Arthur's Horror has lots of features and cracks (the first 20m is sparse protection) and is a great place to practice multi pitch anchors and hanging belays and rope management.
  - v. Main Wall - Many of the routes to the right of Arthur's Horror are quite easy, though have variable levels of protection - Belay stations determine the pitch lengths.
- c. Milestones:
- i. Was every part of the climbing process as safe as possible?
  - ii. Did I hesitate or doubt myself during any part of the full process? If yes, I should go back and practice until there is no doubt.
  - iii. Did I manage the belays and leader transitions safely and efficiently?



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- iv. Before moving on, have an experienced trad leader second you on a few climbs. Solicit as much feedback as possible, and only continue when there is nothing significant left to improve.

### 5. Moderate single pitch leading

- a. Notes: For leaders who are ready to progress past easy beginner routes and want to expand their climbing possibilities. Many routes require more of the climber, such as more interesting movement or creative gear placement.
- b. Locations (Lukenya):
  - i. Fig Tree Face - Syrup of Figs (S) - A strenuous start leads to a juggy face, with plenty of cracks for protection. 25m, tree anchor, abseil from tree
  - ii. The Cemetery - Cemetery Corner (S) - Interesting movement, with protection where you need it. Make sure you traverse left below the final slab. 20m, tree anchor, abseil from tree
  - iii. Archway Crag - Tramlines (S) - The start is a wide layback, and the cracks are thin but take loads of nuts. 30m, thread anchor, walkoff climber's right
  - iv. Sentry Box Crag - Saracen (VD) - A great climb, with some exciting moves, and lots of protection. For a spicy finish, traverse right to the final headwall of End Wall (Severe). 25m, tree/block anchor, walkoff climber's right
  - v. Lower Cliffs - Gripes (S) - A steep start, with great gear, leads to a juggy face. 20m, tree/block anchor, abseil from tree
  - vi. Egyptian Crag - Cleopatra, Nefertiti, Ammon (guide books says they are VD and D but seemed like S to the author of this guide) - Great easy juggy overhanging finish. Check for bees or hornets in big cracks and overhangs at Egyptian before starting up.
  - vii. Archway Crag - Boilerplate (VS) - A classic of Lukenya: squeeze through the chimney for the original start or layback out right to avoid claustrophobia. The bolt protects the crux moves, which go straight up from the tiny ledge. 30m, tree anchor, walkoff climber's right.
  - viii. Upper Cliffs - Frogman (VS 4c) - Great crack. After the crack head up rightwards to the abseil cable of Lizard.
- c. Locations (Hell's Gate):

The rock at Hell's Gate has much less friction than Lukenya, the style of climbing is different and there is more loose rock, particularly on the top pitch of multi-pitch climbs, so move up the grades prudently.

- i. Fischer's Cliffs - most climbs can be well protected and have bolted anchors at the top to lower-off. A good place to get accustomed to Hell's Gate rock as it avoids the rotten rock at the top of multi-pitch climbs.
- ii. Fischer's Tower - West Rib Variation (aka Map of Africa) (S) - a thin start can be avoided on the right if desired



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- iii. Fischer's Tower - The Groove (HVS) - beautiful, strenuous, and well protected crack climbing. Classic! [maybe advanced unless used to crack climbing and Hell's Gate rock!]
- d. Milestones:
  - i. Did I manage any runouts effectively? Was the risk real or perceived? Did I move through these sections with confidence?
  - ii. Was I as safe as possible on all of these climbs? Was there anything I could have reasonably done to be safer? Are there any specialized techniques that I should learn to climb safer?
  - iii. Before moving on, have an experienced trad leader second you on a few climbs to check your gear. Solicit as much feedback as possible, and only continue when there is nothing significant left to improve.

### **6. Advanced leading**

- a. Notes: These routes are either physically challenging and well protected, or can help you develop a stronger lead head due to safe climbing with exciting gear and committing moves.
- b. Locations (Lukenya):
  - i. Square Crag - Vertical (HS) - A runout slab start brings you to a steep, juggy roof.
  - ii. Lower Cliffs - Gripes Direct (HS) - Steeper and more committing than Gripes.
  - iii. Archway Crag - Junction (VS) - Similar to Boiler Plate, but with some hard moves to get to the bolt and thin moves above.
  - iv. The Cemetery - Cemetery Wall (VS) - A thin start leads to great gear up a crack.
  - v. Nettle Tree Face - Graunch (VS) - Runout, thin climbing in a slabby groove.
  - vi. Upper Cliffs - The Lizard (HVS) - A thin start leads to steep and strenuous crack climbing. Beautiful!
  - vii. Main Wall - Pier 2nd pitch (HVS) - Runout on good, easy climbing with a steep finish protected by a bolt.
  - viii. Main Wall - Seventh Wave 2nd pitch (HVS) - Runout on good, easy climbing with a steep finish protected by a bolt.
  - ix. Main Wall - Last Voyage of the Titanic 2nd pitch (HVS)
  - x. Eagle's Nest Face - Pig's Ear (E1) - An overhung start, then a pumpy layback with great gear.
  - xi. Edinburgh Castle - Queensway (HVS) - One bolt down low, then 3 pieces of gear in 40m of moderate, juggy climbing. Fun climbing in a brilliant, exposed position.
- c. Locations (Hell's Gate):
  - i. Tot Cliff - Black Widow (HVS) - Steep, gymnastic crack climbing. One of the best single pitches at HG.
  - ii. Tot Cliff - Black Panther (VS) - Classic crack climbing.
  - iii. Spring's Wall - Umbra Link (VS) - A fun journey with a variety of climbing and an exciting traverse on the 3rd pitch.
  - iv. Main Wall - Amazing Journey (VS)
  - v. Main Wall - Stiletto (VS)
  - vi. Main Wall - Dogs Body (VS)



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- vii. Main Wall - Gimme Shelter (VS) - description of the route on thecrag.com is correct, but if you have the physical guidebook, on pitch 2 traverse LEFTWARDS on sloping ledges, not rightwards as stated.
- viii. Main Wall - The Devil Drives (VS) - Great crack climbing on the first pitch to two peg belay. 2nd pitch runout on S climbing.
- ix. Main Wall - Olympian (HVS A1 if you aid the crux pitch, or E1 free)
- d. Milestones:
  - i. Was I as safe as possible on all of these climbs? Was there anything I could have reasonably done to be safer?
  - ii. Are there any specialized techniques that I should learn? Would I have been able to back off any of these climbs at any point?
  - iii. Congratulations, you can now safely climb most routes in Kenya!

### 7. Fall practice

- a. Locations:
  - i. Boulder Crag - Right side
- b. Techniques:
  - i. Top rope backup: Set a top rope with enough slack that the lead rope will catch your weight - the top rope is only there to keep you from falling far if your piece fails. Climb up on lead, set a solid piece, and take falls from below, at, and above the piece. Be aware of any potential damage to the piece from these falls (horizontal cams, small nuts, etc).
  - ii. Lead falls: When you are confident in your gear, climb up on lead and set a top piece that you want to fall on. Set backup gear below that piece in case it fails. When ready, take a fall and observe how the gear reacts.
- c. Milestones:
  - i. As the climber, did I feel confident in my gear when I knew it was bomber? Did I fall with a relaxed posture and in a safe manner? Did the gear and system work as I expected it to?
  - ii. As the belayer, did I give my leader an appropriate catch for the situation (soft vs hard)? Did I have the right amount of slack in the system?

### 8. What next?

Now that you have most of the basics, keep climbing, there's always more to learn!

### 9. Recommended Reading

*Rock Climbing Anchors: A Comprehensive Guide* by Craig Luebben. 2007. The Mountaineers Books.  
*Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills* by the Mountaineers (available in MCK library)  
*Climbing Self Rescue* by Molly Loomis and Andy Tyson, *High* by Andy Kirpatrick



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LOCATION	Difficulties	NAME
Archway Crag	Advanced leading	Junction (VS)
	Easy multi pitch leading	Direct Route (crack - belay at tree and top) (VD)
	Easy single pitch leading	Direct Route (VD)
	Moderate single pitch leading	Boilerplate (VS) Tramlines (S)
Boulder Crag	Easy single pitch leading	Boulder Original (D)
Cakewalk Face	Easy single pitch leading	The Cakewalk (D)
Cemetery Crag	Easy single pitch leading	All the VD climbs on the left side
Eagle's Nest Face	Advanced leading	Pig's Ear (E1)
Edinburgh Castle	Advanced leading	Queensway (HVS)
Egyptian Crag	Moderate single pitch leading	Cleopatra, Nefertiti, Ammon (guide books says they are VD and D but seemed like S)
Fig Tree Face	Moderate single pitch leading	Syrup of Figs (S)
Fischer's Cliffs <b>(Hell's Gate)</b>	Moderate single pitch leading	most climbs
Fischer's Tower <b>(Hells Gate)</b>	Moderate single pitch leading	West Rib Variation/Map of Africa (S)  The Groove (HVS) [maybe more advanced]
Jacob's Ladder Face	Easy single pitch leading	Jacob's Ladder (D)
Lower Cliffs	Advanced leading	Gripes Direct (HS)
	Moderate single pitch leading	Gripes (S)
Main Wall	Advanced leading	Last Voyage of the Titanic 2nd pitch (HVS)
		Pier 2nd pitch (HVS)



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Seventh Wave 2nd pitch (HVS)

LOCATION	Difficulties	NAME
	Easy multi pitch leading	Arthur's Horror (S)  Bandstand to 1st pitch anchors (split into two pitches) (D)  Many of the routes to the right of Arthur's Horror are quite easy  The area of rock between Arthur's Horror and Colin's Caper - good for multi-pitch practice
	Easy single pitch leading	Arthur's Horror 1st pitch (D)  Bandstand 1st pitch, only to bolted anchors (D) - 35m  Pier 1st pitch (VD)
Nettle Tree Face	Advanced leading	Graunch (VS)
Sentry Box Crag	Easy single pitch leading	Boomslang (VD)  Sentry Box (D)
	Moderate single pitch leading	End Wall (S)  Saracen (VD or S finishing right)
Spring's Wall <b><u>(Hell's Gate)</u></b>	Advanced leading	Umbra Link (VS)
Square Crag	Advanced leading	Vertical (HS)
The Cemetery	Advanced leading	Cemetery Wall (VS)
	Moderate single pitch leading	Cemetery Corner (S)
Tot Cliff <b><u>(Hells Gate)</u></b>	Advanced leading	Black Panther (VS)  Black Widow (HVS)
Upper Cliffs	Advanced leading	The Lizard (HVS)
	Moderate single pitch leading	Frogman (VS 4c)





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LOCATION	Difficulties	NAME
Main Wall ( <b>Hell's Gate</b> )	Advanced leading	Amazing Journey (VS)
		Dogs Body (VS)
		Gimme Shelter (VS)
		Olympian (HVS A1 or E1 free)
		Stiletto (VS)
		The Devil Drives (VS)