

Hiking Guide to Mount Mulanje



by Drew Corbyn

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Introduction

Mount Mulanje is a hiker's paradise – enchanting and challenging in equal measure. The rocky peaks, high grasslands, deep gorges and powerful rivers transport the visitor into another world. This guidebook aims to help more hikers enjoy the majesty of Mount Mulanje.

Frank Eastwood produced the seminal guide to Mount Mulanje, first published in 1979. This guidebook has borrowed heavily from his early work and other sources such as the Mountain Club of Malawi Handbook. It presents a new format to exploring the mountain; describing the classic routes from base to summit, with detailed maps and route information. It is intended for use in conjunction with a local guide with intimate knowledge of the paths and conditions.

The routes are also hosted on ViewRanger – a website and mobile app that provides additional functionality whilst viewing online or on the mountain.

A Mulanje Cedar below the mighty buttress of Namasile



Mount Mulanje

Mount Mulanje is the highest peak in South-Central Africa - Sapitwa peak reaches a towering 3,002m. It is a huge, isolated massif with 20 peaks of more than 2,500m rising out of a disjointed plateau. A great impression of impregnability is given by its precipitous flanks which rise abruptly from the flat plain below. The west face of Chambe offers the longest rock climb in the whole of Africa - 1,700m of sheer cliff.

Mount Mulanje is the best known and most popular mountain area in Malawi. The peaks are steep and rocky, and range in difficulty from moderate hikes to technical scrambles. There are 10 huts on the mountain that provide shelter for all hikers, and several well-marked trails up to the plateau and between the huts. Local guides and porters are found in the surrounding villages. The best time to visit Mount Mulanje is April to November, though excursions during the other months of the year are also possible.

The mountain is located some 60km south-east of Blantyre, close to the Mozambique border. It supports a range of unique ecosystems, a great diversity of endemic plants and animals, and provides some of the most spectacular scenery in the country. The mountain environment dominates the lives and livelihoods of the surrounding communities, and there are fascinating spiritual beliefs associated with the mountain.

Routes and Peaks

The routes start in the villages around the base of the mountain – there are six main trail heads:

- Fort Lister
- Likhubula valley
- Lujeri (Shed 3) Tea Estate
- Mulanje town (“boma”)
- Nessa village
- Thuchila



Lichenya hut in the morning mist

The hikes from the trail heads to the huts at plateau level typically take three to five hours and involve about 1,200m of altitude gain, and without exception are steep and arduous.

Sapitwa peak is the target for many visitors to the mountain, though there are many interesting peaks to explore. Mount Mulanje's peaks are proud granite monoliths; reaching these summits usually entails negotiating steep slabs, narrow gullies and boulder fields.

This guide provides a series of route descriptions from base to summit, or to other points of interest. However, the multitude of paths, peaks and huts offer boundless combinations for the seasoned visitor to piece together.

Each route has a map that has been sourced from the ViewRanger website. The maps have been re-sized to fit the page and as such the scale is not consistent. Some maps have also been rotated to fit the page; a key indicates the direction of north.

Mountain Huts

There are 10 huts on the mountain:

- Chambe
- Chinzama
- Chisepo
- France's Cottage
- Hope's Rest Cottage¹
- Lichenya
- Madzeka
- Minunu
- Sombani
- Thuchila

The huts are operated by the Department of Forestry with support from the Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust (MMCT) and the Mountain Club of Malawi (MCM). All huts are provided with minimal furnishings (e.g. table, chairs), one or multiple fireplaces for cooking and outdoor latrines. Members of the MCM have access to hut stores with additional kitchenware, mattresses, blankets and first aid kit.

The huts are there to provide shelter for all hikers on the mountain. Chisepo, Chambe and Lichenya are the most popular huts and can be busy with hikers during the peak months. It is not possible to reserve huts in advance - “mountain rules” apply and anyone arriving at a hut will not be turned away! If you are hiking in a big group, it is best to inform MCM and infoMulanje.

A small fee is payable for entry to the park and use of the huts. Tips are recommended for hut watchmen.

Guides and Porters

The Guides and Porters Association (GPA) of Mount Mulanje has a group at each of the trail heads. Guides help navigate up to the rocky peaks and on the many paths and firebreaks that criss-cross the mountain. They can also point out places of interest and share insights into the local culture and beliefs of the mountain.

¹ Constructed out of cedar in 1899, Hope's Rest is the oldest hut on the mountain. It is owned and operated by the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP). For more information, and bookings contact Likhubula House or infoMulanje



Guides from Thuchila GPA atop one of Mount Mulanje's peaks

It is strongly recommended to hike with a guide, particularly when venturing into unfamiliar areas, as navigation can be difficult on the rough terrain and extreme weather conditions can develop rapidly. Guides are not, however, mandatory.

Guides and porters can be organised on the day of the hike with the group at the trail head. A cash advance and a little time is required for them to organise their supplies. The GPA used to operate a roster system with agreed rates, although this is not in service at time of writing. Check the MCM website for the latest news.

Forestry and Hut Fees

A small fee is payable for entry into the park and use of the huts. MCM Members should pay to the club, and non-members should pay to the forestry office at Likhubula or Fort Lister. Enquire at Forestry, InfoMulanje or the MCM website for the current rates.

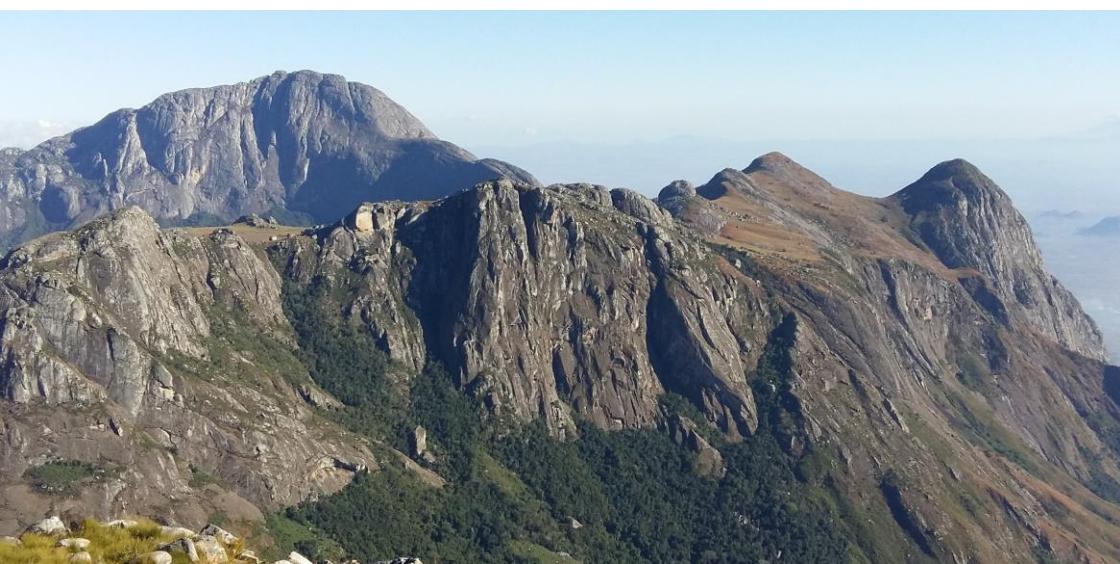
Mountain Club of Malawi (MCM)

The MCM is a small club whose purpose is to assist those who wish to enjoy all that the mountains of Malawi have to offer including hiking, climbing, flora and fauna. MCM is particularly active on Mount Mulanje. Membership of MCM is available on a yearly basis to Malawi nationals and non-nationals who will stay in Malawi for at least six months. Membership offers access to hut stores on Mount Mulanje and options to join group trips and socials.

Importantly, the management of the MCM stores is only possible through active participation of the members going up the mountain. Please remember to fill out the inventory book in the huts, and also to fill out and return the inventory form to the key keepers. This system allows MCM to keep track of all items in the stores, and replenish them in a timely manner.

New members should obtain the MCM Members Handbook to familiarise themselves with the procedures and responsibilities of the Club. The mountain huts are open to everyone, though non-MCM members do not have access to the stores. Hut watchmen bring water and firewood for those staying in the huts. Four mattresses are left out for use by the public at each hut.

Chambe Peak and Bumps viewed from Chisepo Peak



Climate and When to Trek

The best time to trek is from mid-April to end of September. October and November are the hottest and haziest months, becoming cooler and clearer as the rains move in from December to March.

Night frost can be expected from May to August when day-time temperatures are pleasantly cool. During this period, a thick, wet mist known locally as Chiperoni occasionally envelopes the whole massif for one to five days. Navigation in a Chiperoni can be particularly difficult. A sleeping bag is advisable year-round.

Excursions during the rainy season are feasible though extra precautions should be taken. The granite slabs on the peaks are wonderful to walk up in dry conditions but can become treacherously slippery when wet. It is advisable to carry a rope in the rainy season as streams can become raging torrents after a heavy downpour and only a rope will get you safely across.

Environment

Mount Mulanje is a unique and fragile environment that needs your sensitive care.

The mountain is a wood scarce area – when in the huts visitors are requested to use firewood sparingly when cooking and heating water. Bush fires are very destructive and great care should be taken not to start them.

Carry off the mountain any non-biodegradable waste and please assist by picking up any litter on the paths. Limit use of detergents and soaps in the rivers as there are many household users downstream. There are no malaria carrying mosquitoes on the mountain.

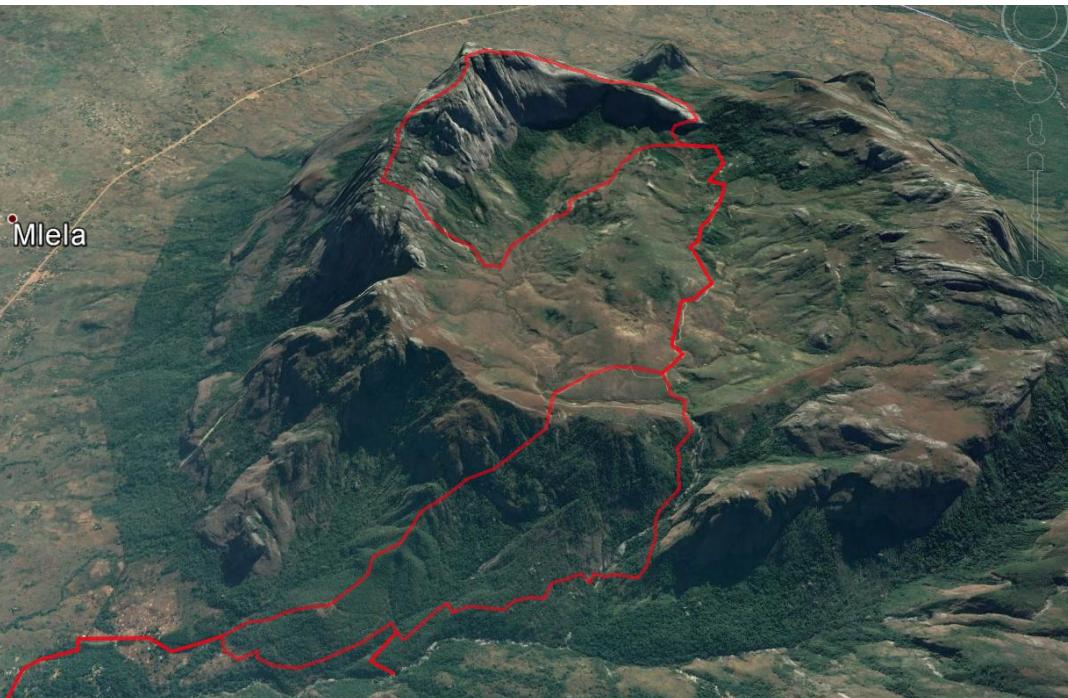
Health and Safety

Mount Mulanje is a rugged place where accidents often happen and tragedies have occurred. Many visitors underestimate the magnitude of the mountain and the associated risks. Follow the golden rules:

- Never hike alone. Hike with a guide or experienced partner.
- Always go well prepared (food, clothes, first aid, guidebook / GPS / map) for cold and wet weather.
- Choose a route within your ability.
- Tell someone your plan and stick to it.

There is no on-call mountain search and rescue service, though teams have mobilised for past emergencies. Note the phone numbers for Department of Forestry Office and MMCT (on the MCM website or InfoMulanje) before setting off.

The Google earth image of Chambe Peak route



Rock Climbing

The longest vertical rock wall in Africa is found on Mount Mulanje - Chambe's 1700m west face. The mountain is home to myriad dramatic cliffs and expansive boulder fields. However, most of the rock is a uniform granite, and in the absence of frost shattering, there are few cracks to place protection. Between good climbing in the few larger crack and chimney systems with adequate protection, blank sections are encountered with only grass tufts and small trees for holds or running belays.

A number of routes have been pioneered though rarely repeated, and virgin territory is not difficult to find. Frank Eastwood's book contains a number of rock climbing routes. The MCM website is another source of information.

Interactive Guides

Each of the 18 routes in this guidebook are also hosted on ViewRanger – a free website and mobile app. In addition to the route description, ViewRanger has an interactive map with detailed topography and routes, huts, peaks and rivers. If using the app for navigation whilst hiking it should be noted that routes may not always give the position of the path with exact precision.

Each of the routes has also been created on Google earth, a free software with an interactive 3D satellite image. A link to the Google earth file is located at the end of each route description (to open, first download the software and be connected to the internet).



More Information

Further information about hiking on the mountain is available on the MCM website: www.mcm.org.mw and in the MCM Handbook.

A free GPS map of Mount Mulanje has been produced that shows the topography, major routes, major peaks, huts and significant features of the mountain.

The MCM Facebook page is an open and active space for sharing information and posting discussions.

Frank Eastwood's 'Guide to Mulanje Massif' (1988) is available in specialist bookstores in Malawi and includes detailed descriptions of hiking and rock climbing routes.

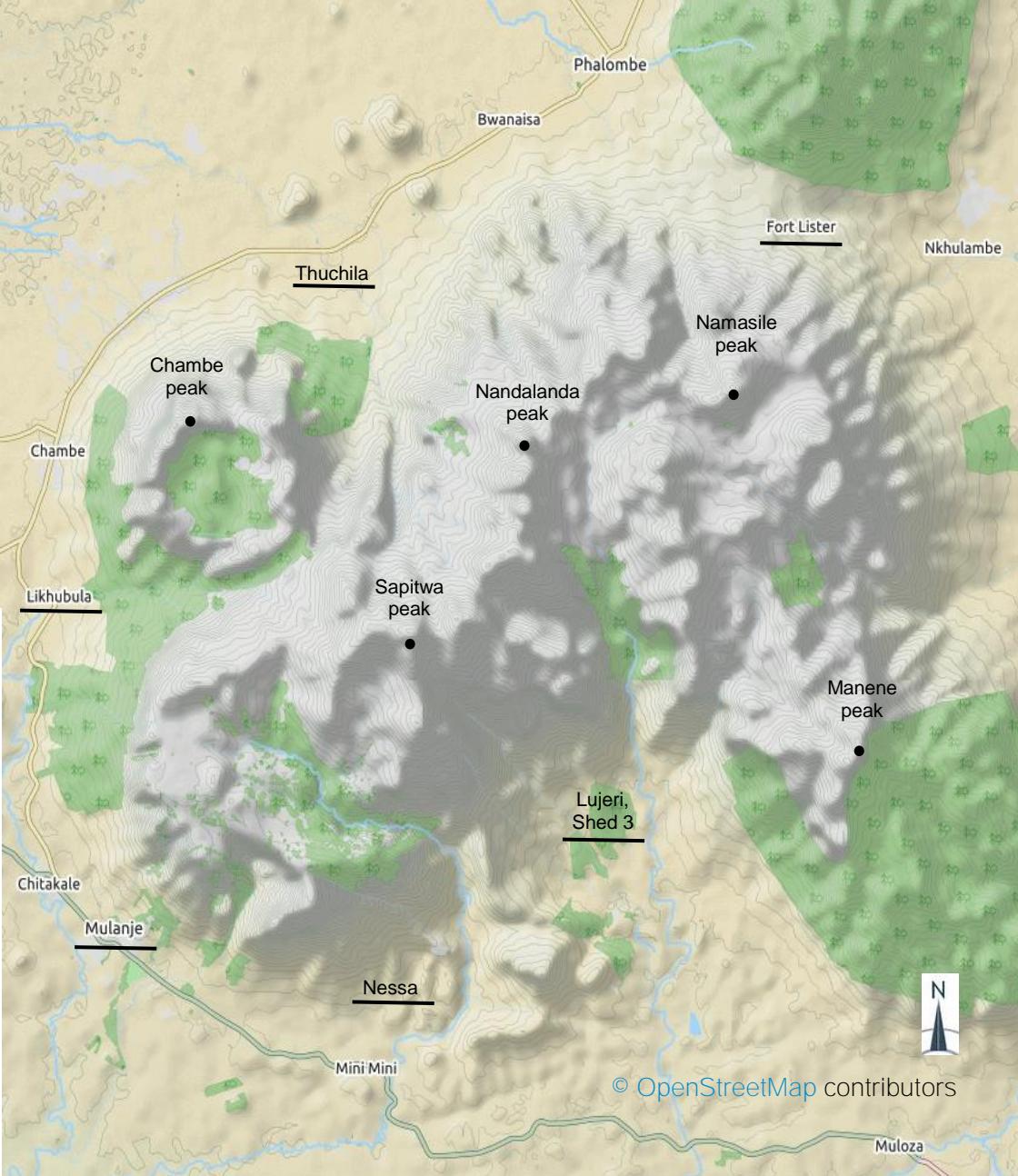
InfoMulanje has a visitor centre in Chitakale, Mulanje. They provide up-to-date information about the mountain, connect hikers with guides and porters, make accommodation bookings at the base of the mountain, and rent out sleeping bags.

Getting There and Away

Mulanje town ("Mulanje boma") is some 60 km from Blantyre on a good tarred road, and has a range of accommodation options. The massif measures 26km by 22km and is circled by a dirt road.

There are frequent mini-buses travelling between Limbe (Blantyre's sister city) and Mulanje town. Public transport serves the villages at the Likhubula, Thuchila and Phalombe (for Fort Lister) trail heads, though there are only a few services each day. Enquire in town for travel times. A chartered vehicle will be required to reach Lujeri Tea Estate or Nessa village and can be arranged from Mulanje town.

Each route description includes a detailed "Getting there and away" section. Directions are given from Mulanje town as this is the main entry point from Blantyre, though travellers from Zomba will arrive on the north side at Phalombe on stretches of tar and dirt road.



Mount Mulanje – the 6 trail heads are indicated with an underscore

| Route | Description | Peaks | Falls | Pools | Huts | Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (hours) | Start / End | Page |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------|-------|-------|----------|------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------------|------|
| 1 day - short | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Likhubula Falls | A short walk to the impressive falls and large pool. | - | ✓ | ✓ | - | 1 | 4 | 300 | 2 | Likhubula | 17 |
| Thuchila Falls and Spirit Dam | Walk through pleasant woodland to the mystical falls and dam. | - | ✓ | ✓ | - | 2 | 3 | 100 | 2 | Thuchila | 21 |
| Mbiya Pools and Ndaonetsa Village | Pass through the scenic tea fields and take a dip in the splendid pools. | - | - | ✓ | - | 2 | 5 | 200 | 2 | Lujeri, Shed 3 | 25 |
| The Crater Mouth | Meander through forest and tea fields to the spectacular Crater mouth | - | - | ✓ | - | 2 | 8 | 300 | 2-3 | Mulanje boma | 30 |
| 1 day - long | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Chambe Basin | Taste Mulanje's high plateau at the Chambe basin on this picturesque loop. | - | ✓ | - | - | 2 | 12 | 1,000 | 5-6 | Likhubula | 35 |
| Boma Path and Linje Pools | Up the steep Boma path to the Lichenya plateau and Linje pools. | - | - | ✓ | - | 4 | 15 | 1,400 | 7 - 8 | Mulanje boma | 39 |
| Porters Race Loop | Follow the route of the renowned Porters Race. | - | ✓ | ✓ | - | 3 | 21 | 1,600 | 8 | Likhubula | 43 |
| 2-3 days | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lichenya Plateau | Peer down into the breathtaking Crater and explore the most expansive grasslands and forests on Mulanje. | - | - | ✓ | Lichenya | 3 | 21 | 1,700 | | Nessa | 47 |
| Nandalanda Peak | Steep slabs and scrambles take you to this classic peak. (Alt. Khuto or Dzole Peak). | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Thuchila | 3 | 19 | 1,800 | | Thuchila | 52 |
| Chagaru Peak | Negotiate the gully and cave to reach the ragged peak. (Alt. Chinzama Peak) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Chinzama | 3 | 25 | 2,100 | | Tinyade Estate, Thuchila | 59 |

| Route | Description | Peaks | Falls | Pools | Huts | Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (hours) | Start / End | Page |
|-----------------------------|---|-------|-------|-------|--|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------|
| Namasile Peak | Namasile has a superb panoramic view, and is one of Mulanje's most accessible peaks. (Alt. Matambale, Masasa or Litakala Peak) | ✓ | - | ✓ | Sombani | 2 | 16 | 1,800 | | Fort Lister | 64 |
| Manene Peak | Peer into Mozambique from Manene at the end of the Mulanje horseshoe. Madzeka falls may be Mulanje's finest. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Madzeka | 3 | 24 | 2,100 | | Lujeri, Shed 3 | 70 |
| Chambe Peak | Straddle megalithic Chambe after a mighty steep scramble. | ✓ | ✓ | - | Chambe, France's | 5 | 33 | 2,500 | | Likhubula | 76 |
| 3 days | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sapitwa Peak from Thuchila | An outstanding direct route to Sapitwa, Mulanje's highest peak. (Alt. Nakodzwe) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Chisepo, Thuchila | 4 | 24 | 2,300 | | Thuchila | 81 |
| Sapitwa Peak from Likhubula | Take in the Chambe basin on the way to the highest peak. (Alt. Nakodzwe) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Chisepo, Chambe / France's | 4 | 31 | 2,600 | | Likhubula | 87 |
| Sapitwa Peak on Crater Path | Brave the Crater path to Lichenya and the rarely-trodden Scorpion route to Sapitwa. | ✓ | - | ✓ | Lichenya | 5 | 41 | 2,500 | | Mulanje boma | 93 |
| 4-5 days | | | | | | | | | | | |
| The Ruo loop | Scrambly peaks, spectacular waterfalls, and stunning pools – the Ruo Loop has it all. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Madzeka, Chinzama, Minunu | 3 | 36 | 2,500 | 4 days | Lujeri, Shed 3 | 99 |
| The Grand Traverse | An epic trek that crosses the full length of Mulanje and touches Sapitwa, its highest point. (Alt. The Grant Circuit) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Lichenya, Chisepo, Thuchila, Chinzama, Sombani | 4 | 53 | 3,000 | 5 days | Mulanje boma / Phalombe | 106 |

Likhubula Falls

Locally known as *Dziwe la Nkhalamba*, the Likhubula Falls are an impressive sight, and particularly powerful in the rainy season. The Likhubula river cascades over a 10-12 m drop into a large pool ideal for swimming. The falls are just a short walk from the access road.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|------|
| - | ✓ | ✓ | - |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (hours) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 4 | 300 | 2 |

Route Description

It is a short and relatively easy walk to the falls. Park the car at the road head and join the path at a bridge crossing a small river. The well-trodden path follows the river up the valley, bends right at a bridge and descends to the falls. The forest cover makes a pleasant and cool walk.

Water levels are at their highest during rains from November – March, and can rise rapidly during storms. The water temperature is always cool, but particularly bracing during June – August.

Photo opposite: Swimming at Likhubula Falls

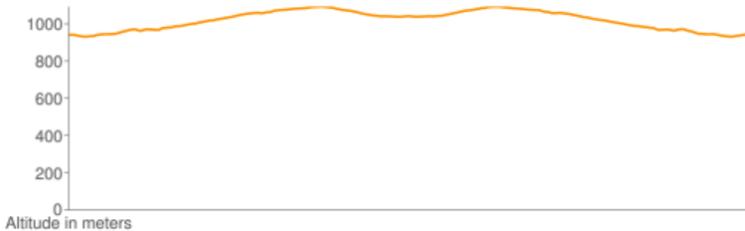


Alternative routes

If you wish to extend the route, park at the Forestry Office compound and walk up the dirt road.

To avoid walking at all, the excellent natural pools next to the CCAP campsite are also a great spot for a swim.

Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

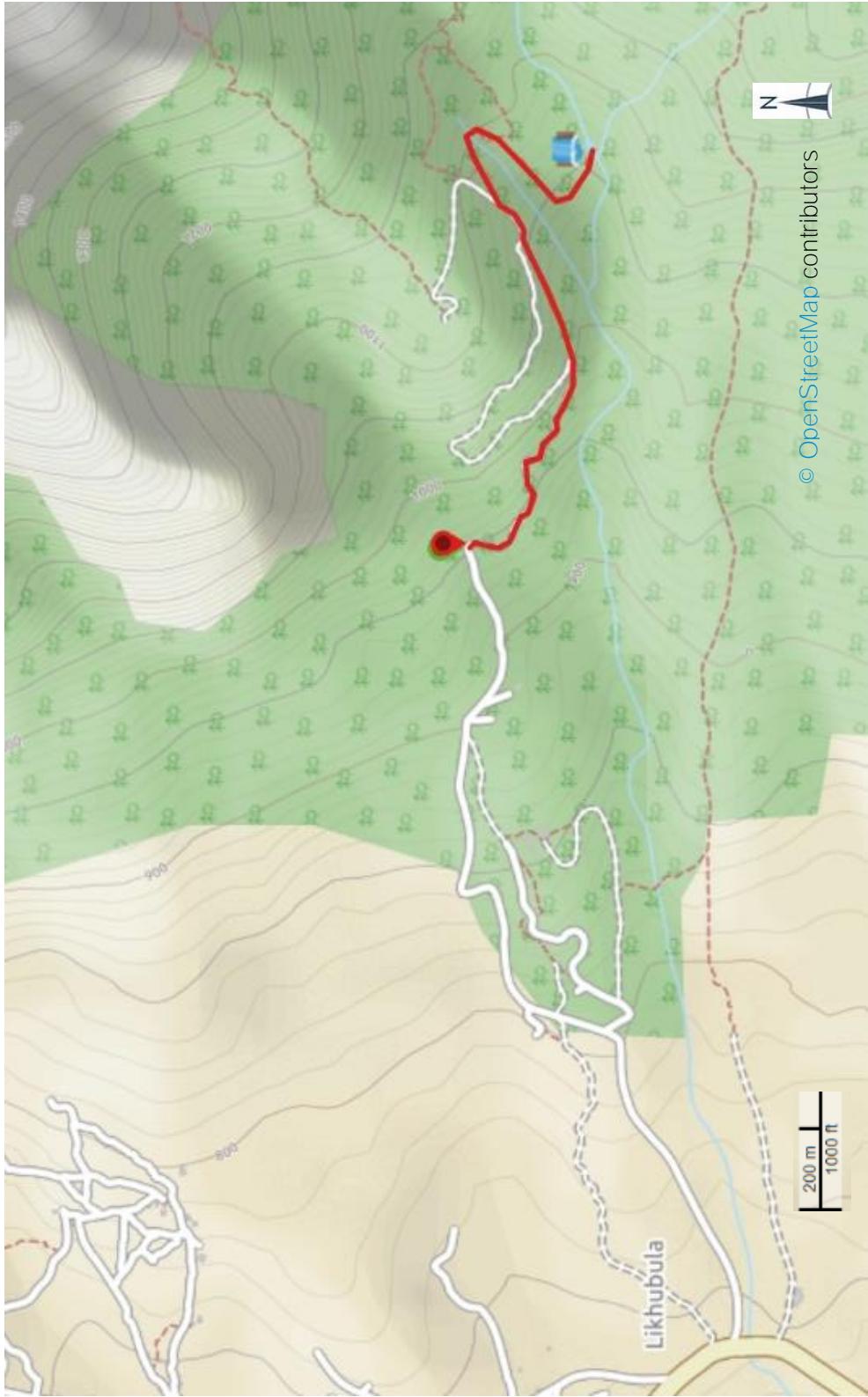
Likhubula Forest Office is the base for this walk. From Mulanje town (Chitakale), take the turn northwards onto the dirt road at InfoMulanje, and follow for about 10km to Likhubula. After entering the Forestry Office compound, turn left and follow the dirt road to its end. Park the car just before a bridge crossing a river.

The Forestry Office will charge a park entry and vehicle entry fee. Expect to be approached by many people offering services for guiding and watching your vehicle.





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Thuchila Falls and Spirit Dam

Thuchila falls is a hidden gem. The 15-20m high cascade drops into a huge pool formed by the mystical Spirit Dam. The high cliffs provide a natural diving board for the brave. Above the falls the river has carved beautiful plunge pools into the hard granite bed.

It is a short walk from Thuchila Lodge passing through pleasant woodland and crossing the Thuchila river.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|------|
| - | ✓ | ✓ | - |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (hours) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 2 | 3 | 100 | 2 |

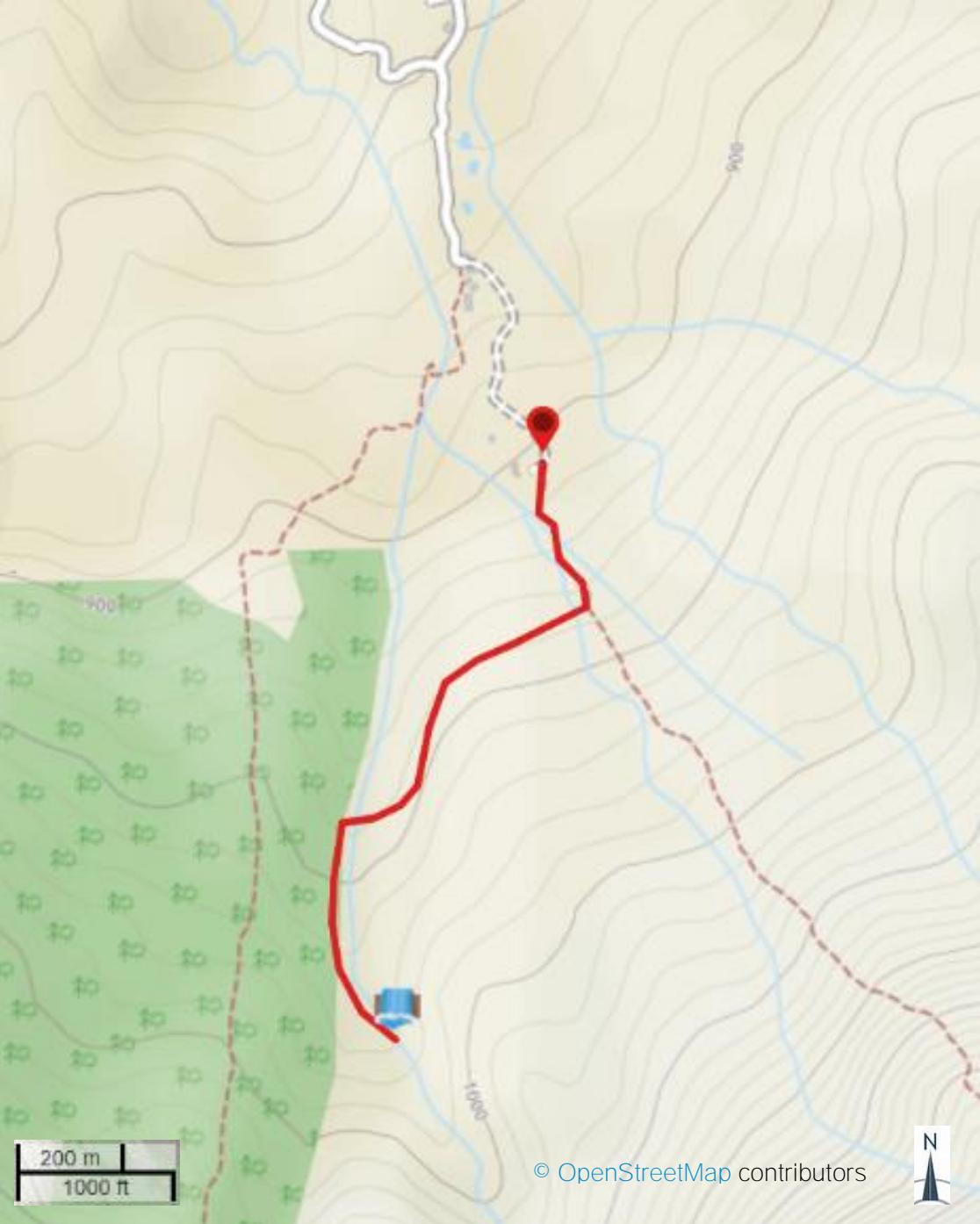
Route Description

The route starts from Thuchila Lodge and gently climbs through Brachystegia woodland. After a few hundred metres the path bears right and maintains a steady elevation before dropping down to the Thuchila river. There are many paths criss-crossing through this area and it would be easy to get lost without a guide.

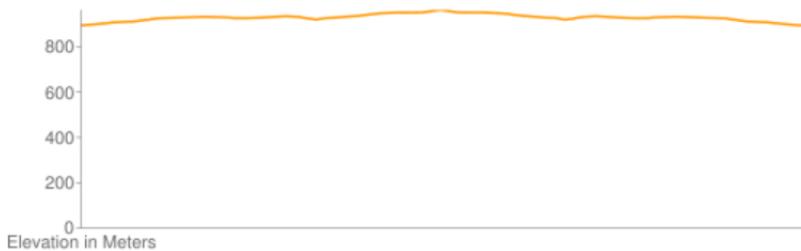
Boulder-hopping takes you across the river which you then follow all the way to the falls and dam. This section has narrow segments of path with a steep drop to the river below. Above the falls is another glorious section of river.

Photo opposite: Thuchila Falls and the pool formed by Spirit Dam





Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

The route starts and ends at Thuchila Lodge. From Mulanje town (Chitakale), take the turn northwards onto the dirt road at InfoMulanje, and follow for about 28km to Thuchila.

There is a guides and porters station by the market in Kambenje Village, marked with a sign on the right-hand side of the road just before the main bridge. The guide will direct you to Thuchila Lodge; it is a short distance further on the main road before turning right through fields and woods.



Mbiya Pools and Ndaonetsa Village

The spiritual Mbiya pools are a series of plunge pools connected by small drops and chutes. Mbiya - the traditional spherical clay pot – beautifully describes the ponds formed by the power of the Little Ruo river.

It is a short walk from the road through a village and tea fields to the pools. The pools are nestled behind Ndaonetsa village on the periphery of the Lujeri Tea Estate. The drive to the start takes you on red dirt roads carved amongst the lush green tea fields with majestic Mount Mulanje in the backdrop – surely one of the most picturesque scenes around the mountain.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|------|
| - | ✓ | ✓ | - |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (hours) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 2 | 5 | 200 | 2 |

Route Description

Start the route on the road about half-way between Shed 3 and the Lujeri hydro-electric station. Cross the Ruo river on a steel footbridge and arrive in Ndaonetsa village – the children are likely to give you a warm welcome. You may also wish to start from Shed 3 in which case the guide will lead you on a direct route to the village.

Walk along the red path boulevards of Ndaonetsa set amongst the fields of the small-holder tea farmers. The Ruo valley is the wettest

side of the mountain and allows farmers to grow pineapples, bananas, mangos and avocados. There are many paths criss-crossing through the village and surrounding fields and it would be easy to misplace the route without a guide.

Follow the main path to Madzeka Hut for about 1.5km before cutting off right and descending through fields to the pools. An alternative path can be followed on the return.

Alternative routes

High above the Mbiya pools is a dramatic waterfall where the Little Ruo falls of a cliff from the plateau. A huge boulder perched on a hillside facing the waterfall offers a spectacular viewpoint. The rock is on the main path to Madzeka Hut some 800m elevation above the pools, and perhaps four hours return from Ndaonetsa.

Mbiya pools on the lower section of the Little Ruo river



Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

The Lujeri guides and porters are based at Shed 3, about 18km deep inside the Lujeri Tea Estate. The maze of red dirt roads winding through the tea fields can be difficult to navigate. Turn off the M2 at the signpost for Lujeri Head Office and stay on this road all the way to the numerous buildings of the Estate Office. Bear left past the diesel pumps and after about 1 km turn right over the Lujeri river. Take the left at the entrance to the Tea Factory and hairpin left again at the next junction. Keeping straight, Shed 3 is some 3-4 km ahead.

There is a parking spot closer to Ndaonetsa village, about 2km beyond Shed 3 at a junction with a big path that leads down hill to a steel footbridge crossing the river.





© OpenStreetMap contributors

200 m
1000 ft



Directions through the
Lujeri Estate to Shed 3.



The Crater Mouth

The forests and tea fields surrounding Mulanje town offer surprising tranquillity and some of the finest views of the mountain from ground level. The Crater is a deep bowl defined by sheer cliffs and peaks all the way around, with the exception of the Muloza river that forms the mouth of the Crater.

This short circular walk meanders through the old forest and blue gum plantations to the mouth of the Crater and back through tea fields.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|------|
| - | - | X | - |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (hours) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 2 | 8 | 300 | 2-3 |

Route Description

The route starts at Kara O'Mula, a hotel and restaurant built in 1905 as the original residence of the district commissioner. It has a swimming pool fed by the nearby river and a terrace that hosts spectacular sunsets (a sun-downer is likely to prove irresistible).

The route starts in one of the few remaining areas of old forest on the mountain at this altitude, and certainly the most accessible. Protected by the tea estates, a variety of large native trees remain and it is a rich habitat for wildlife - monkeys and birdlife abound.

From the car park join the path signposted for the mountain – this is the start of the ‘Boma path’. After just a few metres turn right off the main path (if you reach the river you have gone too far). Follow this path directly up for a short distance before turning right on a faint (and often overgrown) path that contours at the same level. Stay on this

until joining a dirt road, bearing straight on. As the road starts to climb and curl left, join a footpath heading up and right. Follow this through to the blue gum plantation.

The boundary of the tea estate and forestry reserve is clear (ironically, the estate has trees and the forest reserve is denuded - devastated by deforestation). From here the path follows the boundary all the way to the Crater keeping the mountain on the left. The path tends up and down (steeply at times) as it crosses two rivers. The dramatic Manga peak is straight ahead, looming ever larger as you approach the mouth of the Crater.

The so-called Crater is a deep fault in the plateau carved out by the Muloza river. The depression is defined by sheer cliffs and peaks all the way around, with the exception of the river that forms the mouth of the Crater. The plateau can be reached by a tough hiking path (the Crater path) following the ridge on the left side of the Crater. On the opposite side, a mountaineering route direct to Manga peak follows the shoulder and steep upper faces.

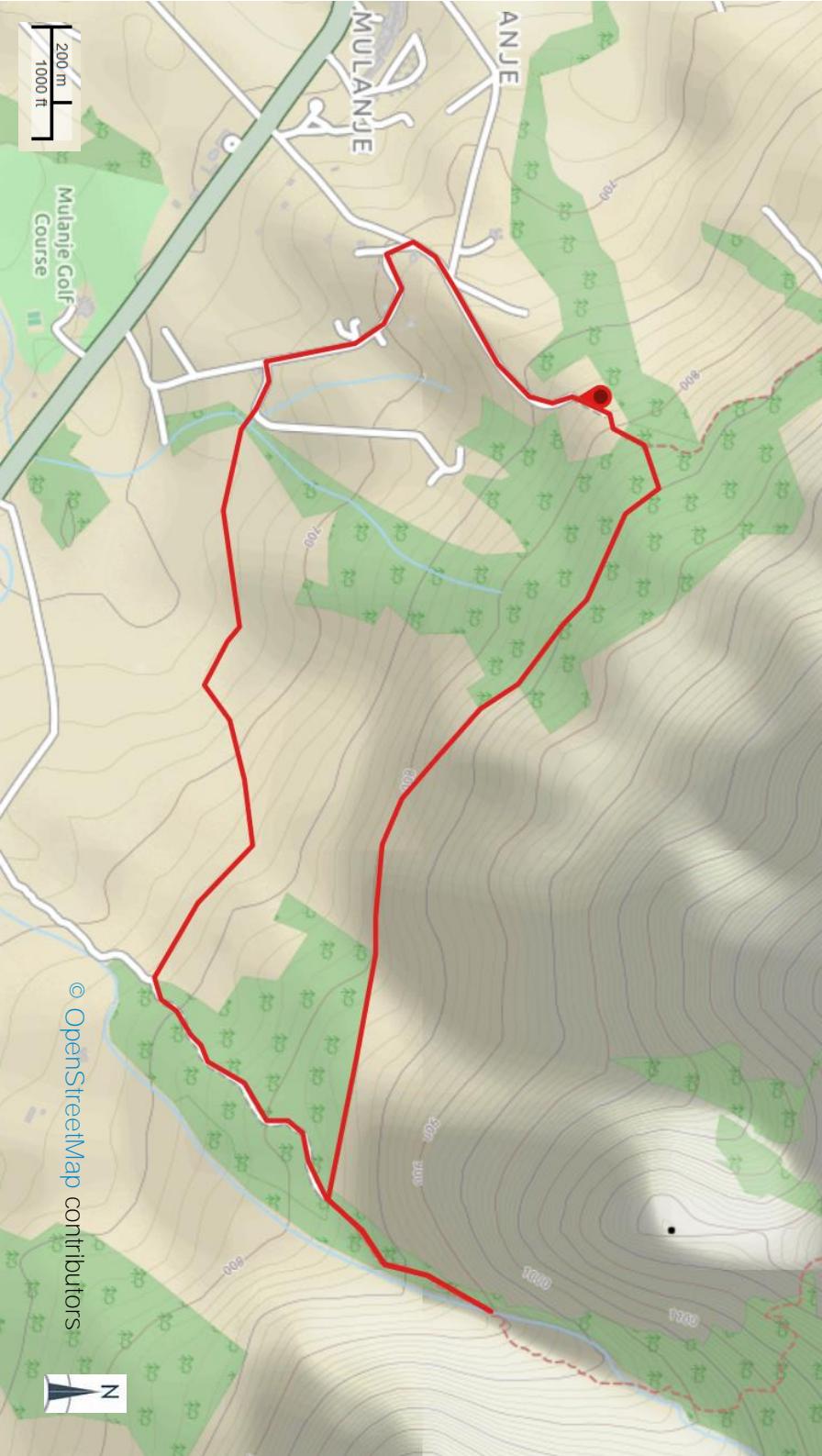
A huge boulder sits at the crossroads of two paths at the Crater mouth. For a side trip, turn left to natural pools on the Muloza river arriving after about 1km.

Turn right for the walk back, immediately entering the dense blue gum plantation and weaving gently down before popping out into the lush tea fields of Lauderdale Estate. The return route mainly sticks to the red dirt roads dividing up the tea fields, though minor paths provide short cuts across rivers and through patches of forest. The network of roads and paths in the tea estate do not lend themselves to precise description, though you can't go far wrong if you keep the mountain on the right. The route joins the paved road to Kara O'Mula a few hundred metres below the car park.

A guide is strongly recommended to navigate the maze of paths cutting through the forest and the network of roads servicing the tea fields. Guides can usually found at the Kara O'Mula carpark, or InfoMulanje in Chitakale.



Manga Peak towering above the Crater Mouth



© OpenStreetMap contributors

Alternative peaks

The peak guarding the left side of the Crater mouth, the Pinnacle, makes for a very challenging side trip. It offers spectacular views deep into the Crater and across to Manga peak. At the Crater mouth, the path (marked by red paint dots) crosses the Muloza river and moves up through the forest for a short distance before a second river crossing (the last chance to fill up water bottles). The path zig-zags sharply up the valley side to join the ridge at a saddle; the peak is a few hundred metres along the sharp ridge. It is a difficult ascent on loose earth through dense bush. Allow 4-5 hours for the return walk from the huge boulder at the Crater mouth.

Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

This circular walk is from Kara O'Mula hotel in Mulanje boma. Kara O'Mula is high up on the hill overlooking the tea estates. Turn left off the main road after the market (opposite the police station) and follow the paved road steeply up to its terminus at the hotel car park.



Chambe Basin

Reach Chambe basin to get a real sense of Mount Mulanje's high plateau and view Chambe Peak's dramatic east face on this day trip from Likhubula.

The circular route ascends the Skyline and descends the Chapaluka path – two paths in close proximity but interestingly different. Likhubula falls (*Dziwe la Nkhalamba*) is a short detour on the return stretch.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|------|
| - | ✓ | ✓ | - |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (hours) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 2 | 12 | 1,100 | 5-6 |

Route Description

The route starts and ends at the Likhubula Forestry Office, where you can park and arrange guides. Take the Skyline path to the plateau at Chambe basin - about 3 hours, with 1,000m of steep ascent on a well-trodden path. Look out for the cable runner – the 'Skyline' - that was used to transport harvested pine down the mountain.

After crossing a stream, the lower section is a slog directly up on a broad path through woodland. The upper part has wide views as the path traverses the precipitous higher reaches of the Lichenya valley. Breathe a sigh of relief upon reaching the abruptly level ground of Chambe basin whilst enjoying views of Chambe's dramatic east face.



Chambe Basin from the sky

The direct route to the top of the Chapaluka path follows a firebreak that traces the edge of the plateau – this is found on the right at the top of the Skyline. Alternatively, follow the main path towards Chambe Hut for a short distance and take a right turn at a junction signposted for Chapaluka.

The top of the Chapaluka path is found near where the stream leaves the plateau (and where a weir has created a small pool). The path drops steeply down through forest into a narrow valley with imposing cliffs ahead to meet the stream. The river scenery is beautiful – with lush forest and white water forcing its way through large boulders.

The route has numerous boulder-hopping crossings of the Chapaluka and Namingazi streams. The streams become difficult to ford during the rains and impassable after particularly heavy downpours.

The path joins the Chapaluka dirt road that extends high up the Likhubula valley. Follow this through covered woodland all the way

back to the Forestry Office compound. A stop-off at the Likhubula Falls (*Dziwe la Nkhalamba*) is well worth it. Likewise, the excellent natural pools next to the CCAP campsite are also a great spot for a swim.

Alternative routes

Spend the night in Chambe Hut or France's Cottage, about 3km of relatively flat walking from the top of the Skyline.

Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

Likhubula Forest Office is the base for this walk. From Mulanje town (Chitakale), take the turn northwards onto the dirt road at InfoMulanje, and follow for about 10km to Likhubula. After entering the Forestry Office compound, turn left and follow the dirt road to its end. Park the car just before a bridge crossing a river.

The Forestry Office will charge a park entry and vehicle entry fee. Expect to be approached by many people offering services for guiding and watching your vehicle.





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500 m
2000 ft

Likhubula

Boma Path and Linje Pools

The Boma path is the most accessible route onto Mount Mulanje's grassy uplands, and a direct way onto the Lichenya plateau. The final ascent is notoriously steep and should not be hiked when it is wet.

Stand on the edge of the plateau and peer out over the cliffs of the Lichenya face that drop 1,200m down to the tea fields below. The Linje pools are tranquil ponds that hold the stream just before it plunges over the edge.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|------|
| - | - | ✓ | - |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (hours) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 4 | 15 | 1,400 | 7-8 |

Route Description

The route starts from Mulanje boma. Pick up the trail at Kara O'Mula, the former District Commissioner's house, now a hotel and restaurant.

The path begins by meandering along the upper edge of Chitakale Estate with glorious views across the tea fields. After some 500m a sharp turn to the right starts the ascent to the plateau – a gruelling yet rewarding 3 hours with some great rock scrambling and views over Mulanje town. A river crossing is a good place to rest before the final climb. Care should be taken on the top section which is particularly steep; grass tufts provide foot and scramble holds up rock slabs.

At the top, you reach the Lichenya Plateau, perhaps the most expansive area of wood and grassland on the mountain. The Linje

pools are approximately 3km (1 hour) along firebreaks across the flat grassland. The path crosses an improbable airstrip, though landings are a rarity. The airstrip is on a bed of bauxite (aluminium ore); the surrounding area is home to the largest deposits on the mountain, where large well-formed crystals can be found.

The pools are just a short distance from the edge of the plateau at one of the steepest points on the Lichenya face – the cliffs drop 1,200m down to the tea fields below.

An alternative destination to the pools is the quaint Hope's Rest Cottage – built in 1899 out of Mulanje cedar, it is the oldest hut on Mount Mulanje.

Retrace your footsteps all the way back to Kara O'Mula.

Additional peaks

The Lichenya plateau is home to Simpson's Peak (2,280m) and Chilemba Peak (2,365m), though it would be difficult to reach either without spending a night on the plateau. Both offer great views of the plateau, and Chilemba peers out towards Chambe peak and the Likhubula valley.

Lichenya plateau from the sky

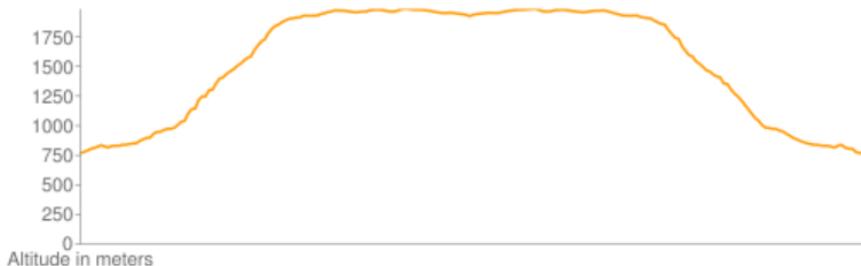


Alternative routes:

There is plenty to discover on the plateau – the Crater rim, Lichenya river and pools, and rolling grasslands. Hope's Rest Cottage and Lichenya Hut are both well situated to explore the area.

There are many alternative routes onto the Lichenya plateau – the two paths from Nessa, the Milk Run from Likhubula or the Crater path from the boma.

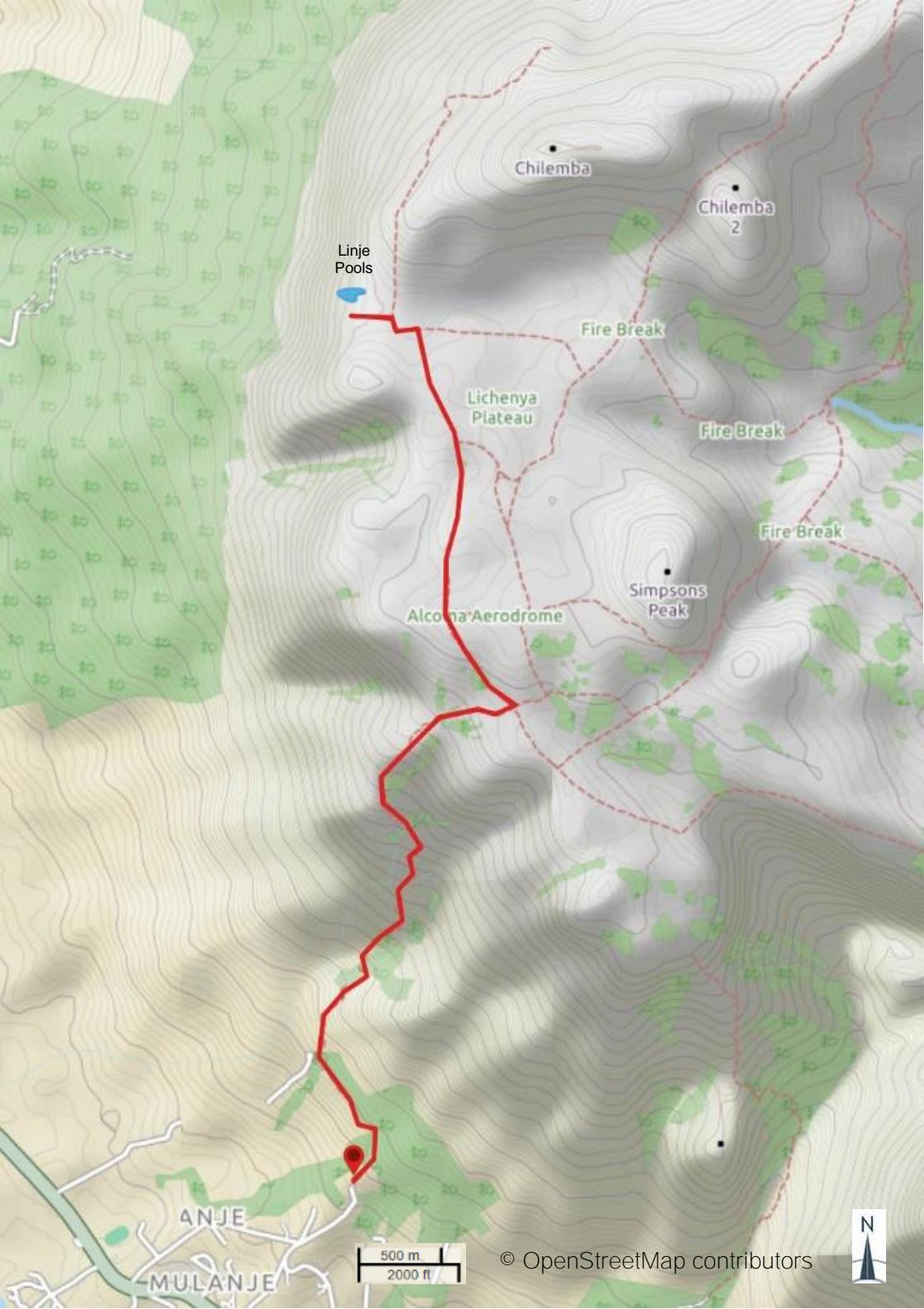
Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

This walk starts and ends from Kara O'Mula hotel in Mulanje boma. Kara O'Mula is high up on the hill overlooking the tea estates. Turn uphill off the main road after the market (opposite the police station) and follow the paved road steeply up to its terminus at the hotel car park.





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Porters Race Loop

Follow the route of the renowned Mount Mulanje Porters Race. Head up the Skyline path and onto Chambe basin before turning towards the Lichenya plateau and down the Milk Run.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|------|
| - | - | ✓ | - |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (hours) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 3 | 21 | 1,600 | 8 |

Route Description

The route starts and ends at the Likhubula Forestry Office, where you can park and arrange guides.

Take the Skyline path to the Chambe basin - about 3 hours, with 1,000m of ascent. Look out for the cable runner – the ‘Skyline’ - that was used to transport pine harvested on the basin down the mountain.

Breathe a sigh of relief upon abruptly reaching the level ground of Chambe basin. Enjoy views of Chambe’s dramatic east face over the next 2 to 3 km of relatively flat ground. The route meets France’s Cottage and Chambe Hut before rolling upwards to the pass connecting Chambe to the main massif known as the Knife Edge. As you leave Chambe you can peer down the Thuchila valley with fantastic views of the trio of peaks - Dzole, Khuto and Nandalandia.



A runner on Chambe basin during the Porters Race

On the saddle, at the junction with the Chisepo path, turn right towards Lichenya plateau. The path crosses numerous small rivers as it passes under North Peak.

The highest point is at the watershed between the Likhubula and Lichenya rivers. Here the path turns right as you cross between firebreaks. Joining the second firebreak marks the top of the Milk Run – the route used to bring milk up to the families spending the hot season on the plateau.

The Milk Run hugs the south side of the Likhubula valley as it takes you down, becoming less steep as you descend.

Just before arriving back at the Forestry Office, the path crosses the Likhubula river at a set of pools – you may well be tempted to take a dip and wonder how the fastest runners complete the loop in just 2 hours and 10 minutes!

Alternative peaks

Chambe Peak (2,538 m, 5-6 hours, Difficulty 5). See route description for detailed information.

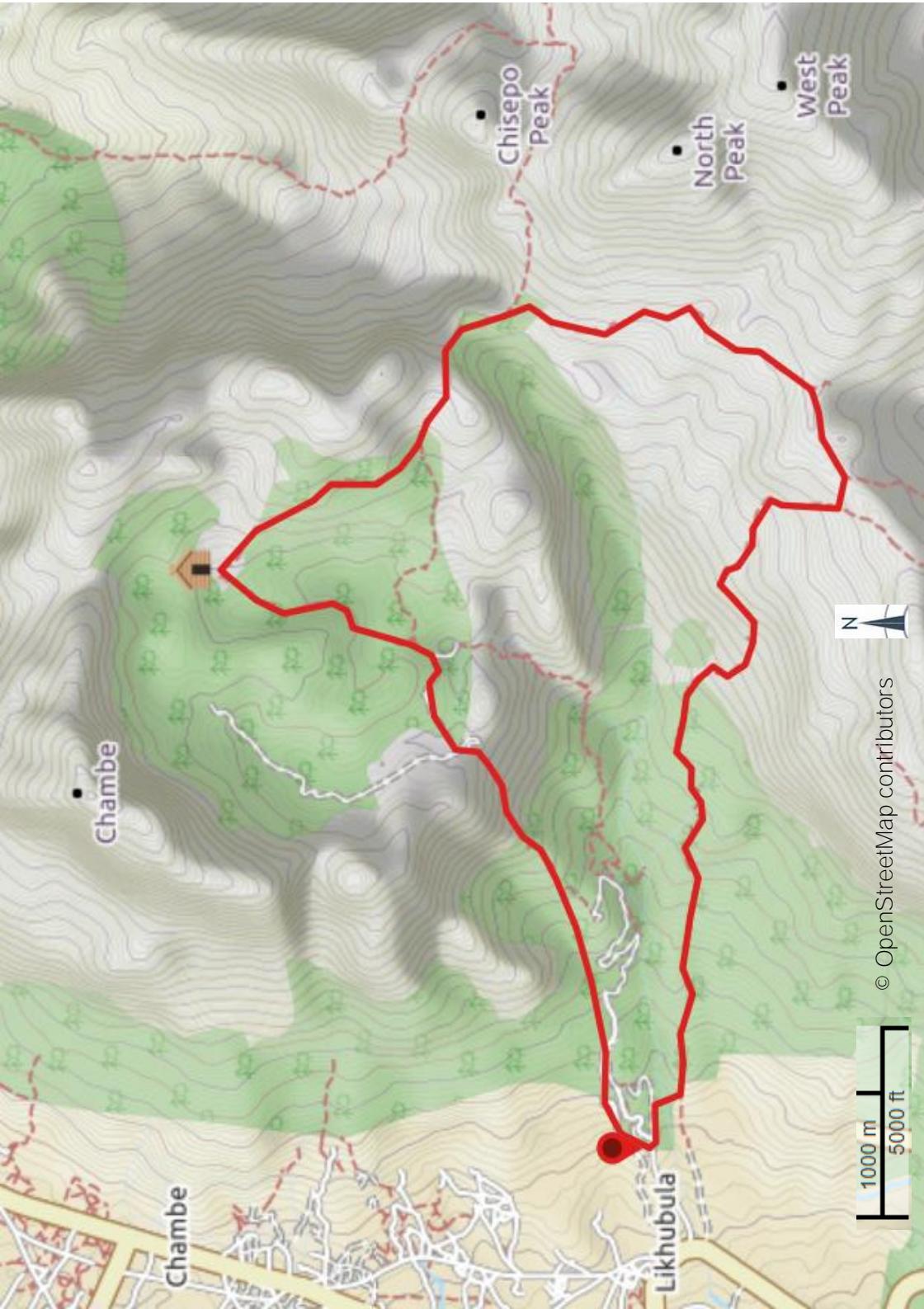
Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

Likhubula Forest Office is the base for this walk. From Mulanje town (Chitakale), take the turn northwards onto the dirt road at InfoMulanje, and follow for about 10km to Likhubula. The Forestry Office will charge a park entry and vehicle entry fee. Expect to be approached by many people offering services for guiding and watching your vehicle.





Lichenya Plateau

The Lichenya plateau is the most expansive area of upland grass and forest on Mount Mulanje - home to tranquil rivers, rolling hills and quaint cottages.

This 2-day circular route from Nessa village takes in the spectacular Crater rim where you can sit atop the precipitous cliffs and peer into the depths below.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|----------|
| - | ✓ | ✓ | Lichenya |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 3 | 21 | 1,700 | 2 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Nessa village to Lichenya Hut. Take the Bamboo path to the Crater rim and on to the hut. (6 – 7 hours)

Day 2: Lichenya Hut to Nessa village. Follow the Lichenya river before joining the main Nessa path down. (6 hours).



A gentle stroll through the meadow on Lichenya plateau

Route Description

Day 1: The route starts and ends in Nessa village. Guides and porters can be arranged at the parking place.

The Bamboo path starts out through the village and smallholders' fields. The path climbs steeply to a shoulder and follows a slight ridge above a river system on the right. It is a steep and somewhat tedious climb up the steep slope without forest cover until the higher reaches.

Soon after entering the forest and topping out on the plateau, the path breaks into open grassland and moves left to the Crater edge (a good spot for a picnic).

The so-called Crater is a deep fault in the plateau carved out by the Muloza river. The depression is defined by sheer cliffs and peaks all the way around, with the exception of the river that forms the mouth of

the Crater. The path follows the Crater rim to join the top of the Boma path near Simpson's Peak. It is a further 2km along firebreaks to Lichenya Hut.

View drone footage from an MCM group trip on the Crater and Lichenya Plateau from [Fly High Africa](#) (follow this link on search on YouTube).

Day 2: Begin the second day by tracking the upper reaches of the Lichenya river. From the hut drop down steeply through the forest and join the path hugging the gentle riverbank for about 1km. Climb away from the river and out of the trees to broad, open grasslands and past a private cottage. Enter the forest again and drop down to a river crossing before climbing up to join the main path to Nessa.

The path meanders through forest on the plateau for some 3km before starting the descent. The upland forest gives way to open bush and views over the lower portion of the Lichenya valley and across towards the Lujeri Tea Estate. The path winds its way down the mountain side and soon enters the pineapple fields surrounding Nessa, crossing a stream before entering the village.

Additional peaks

Lichenya plateau hosts four smaller peaks. Chilemba (2,365m. 3-4 hours. Difficulty 2) is the highest and has great views over the plateau and across the Likhubula valley to Chambe peak. A nice circuit can be made by passing CCAP Hut in one direction and via the top of the Milk Run for return - allow 3-4 hours.

South Peak is most accessible from Lichenya Hut, though it is still a full day's walk to what is one of Mount Mulanje's most remote peaks.

Alternative routes

The return to Nessa can be hastened by missing out the river section below the hut; instead go back along the firebreak on the main Nessa path from the start.

There are many alternative routes onto the Lichenya plateau – the Milk Run from Likhubula, the Boma path or the Crater path.

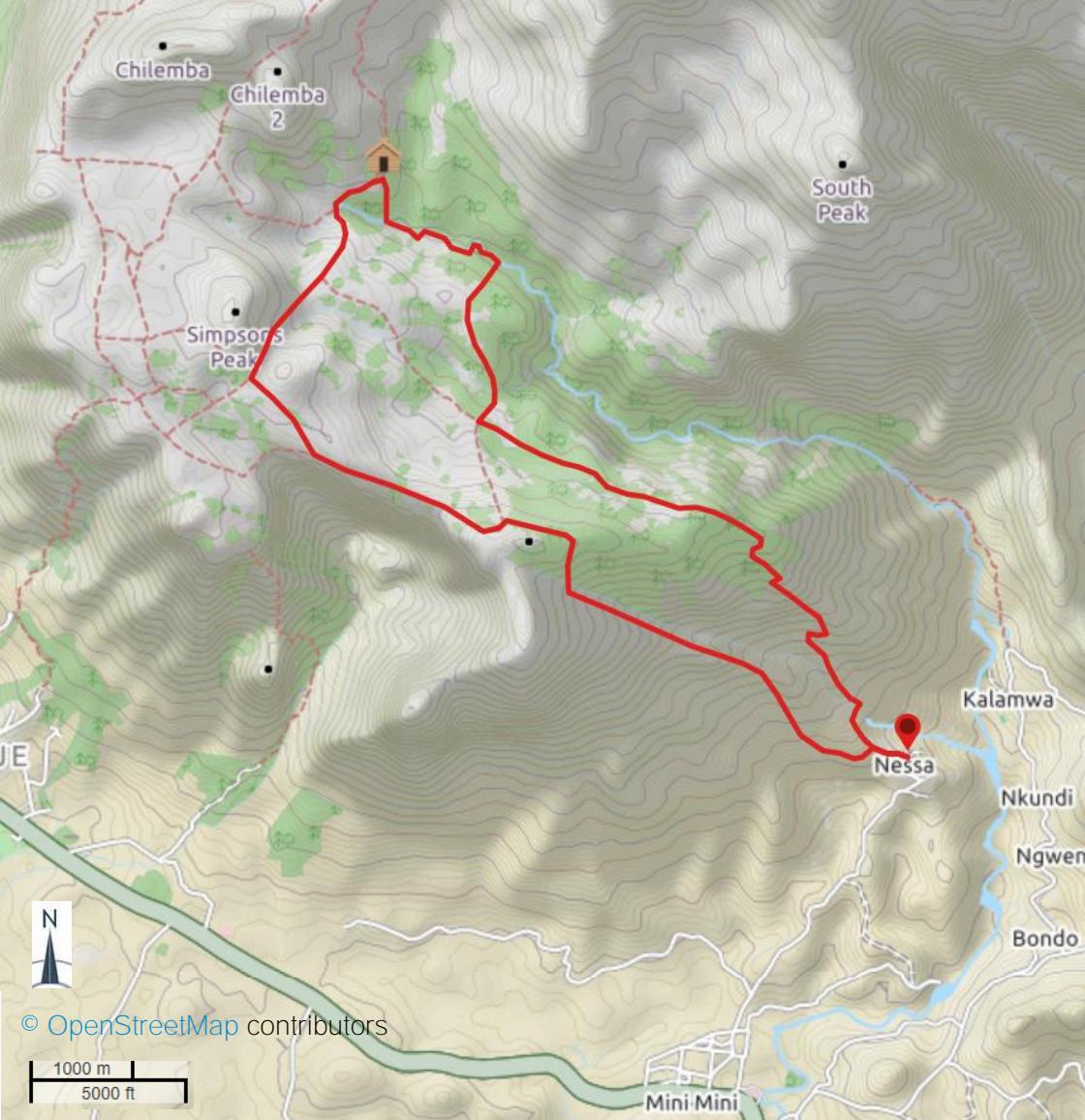
Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

The turn off for Nessa village is at Mini-Mini estate, some 10km past Mulanje boma on the paved road. The left turn is signposted Nessa village. It is then 5-6 km on a dirt road to the village and parking place. The road is steep and rough in places, though passable without a 4WD in good conditions.





Nandalanda Peak

A very popular peak amongst seasoned hikers, Nandalanda is a gem. At 2,590m it is a modest height, but still involves the slabs, scramble and scenery of a classic Mount Mulanje peak.

Thuchila Hut is arguably the best hut on the mountain to watch the sunset. This circular route passes nice pools and waterfalls.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|----------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Thuchila |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 3 | 19 | 1,800 | 2 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Thuchila Lodge up Elephant's Head to Thuchila Hut (3-4 hours).

Day 2: Nandalanda peak (3-4 hours), down the Lukulezi path to Tinyade Estate and across to Thuchila Lodge (3-4 hours).

Consider climbing Nandalanda peak on day 1 if time and legs allow. This walk could also be enjoyed as a 3-day trip, with a second night at Thuchila Hut making for a much more relaxed itinerary.



Sunset behind Chambe Peak on the descent from Nandalanda

Route Description

Day 1: The route starts and ends at Thuchila Lodge, though the guides are stationed at Kambenje village.

The route starts gently through woodland but soon enough becomes steep and unrelenting. The path climbs up the broad side of a shoulder before hitting the ridge that takes you to the plateau level. A tall cascade of water can be seen from the ridge in the wet season (though this route does not have any streams to fill up water bottles). The path tops out onto what is known as 'Elephant's Head' – when you reach Thuchila Hut and look back you will see why.

A fire-lookout shelter positioned at the top of the ascent is an excellent spot to watch the sunset. The hut is about 1km of gentle walking along a firebreak from here. Allow 3-4 hours for the ascent. There are nice pools about 15-20 minutes from the hut along the Lukulezi path, though they are empty in the dry season.

Day 2: Nandalanda peak deceptively overlooks Thuchila Hut, with Castle Rock presenting itself as a false summit.

The route begins at a firebreak behind the hut on a narrow path passing through thick bush; the grand slabs are reached soon enough. The climb goes directly up the line of the fluted slabs and passes to the left-hand face of the prominent Castle Rock.

From the side of Castle Rock head directly across the grassy saddle towards a second false summit and another steeper slab climb. The path moves past a huge balancing boulder and across a shallow gully.

The true summit is protected by a rock wall and mass of boulders. It is a nervy passage through the boulders, with a bold step across a gap, followed by a narrow squeeze with a wobbly boulder, and a delicate traverse. The summit beacon is then just a short, steep scramble away. Retrace your steps for the return to Thuchila Hut.

A good way back to the base is on the Lukulezi path – this is an attractive and gentler route though further than straight back down Elephant's Head. Head north on the firebreak from Thuchila Hut, crossing two streams and moving over easy ground for some 2 km.

After entering the woodland, the path drops steeply, zig-zagging down the mountain side. Water from a high cascade crosses the path creating a succession of stream crossings and a nice plunge pool. The path continues down through the woodland, becoming gentler with distance from the mountain.

Tinyade Estate is reached after some 3 hours' walk from the hut. The walk across through the fields to Thuchila Lodge takes about 1 hour, and is flat until the final short climb up the road. In the warmer months this section can be unpleasantly hot after the cool mountain climes. The river at Thuchila Lodge has some nice pools and great views looking back up the valley to Sapitwa.



Alternative routes

Another option between Thuchila Lodge and Thuchila Hut is the Roots path – this passes the spectacular Thuchila Falls and Spirit Dam. Follow the firebreak towards Chisepo Hut from about 1½ hours before a steep descent to the valley below.

Alternative peaks

Khuto (2,757m. 6 hours. Difficulty: 4) is Nandalanda's larger brother, overlooking protectively from the south. A faint path leaves the firebreak and moves up through grassy slopes, boulders and slabs to a high gully. It takes a tricky move to get into the gully, then boulder hopping to gain height. The highest point is the right hand of the twin peaks.

Dzole (2,715m. 7 hours. Difficulty: 3) is the next in the chain after Khuto. Follow the valley between Khuto and Dzole to the saddle before moving up steeply to the peak.

Both peaks are described in Frank Eastwood's guide.

Altitude Profile

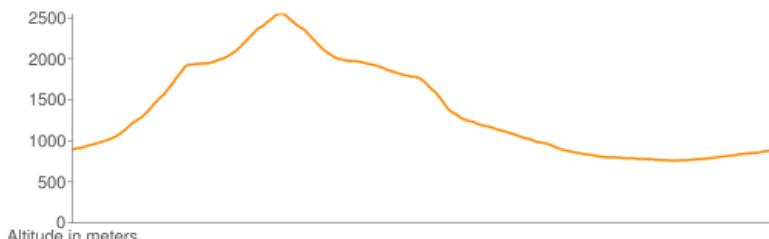


Photo opposite: a waterfall on the Lukulezi path

Getting there and away

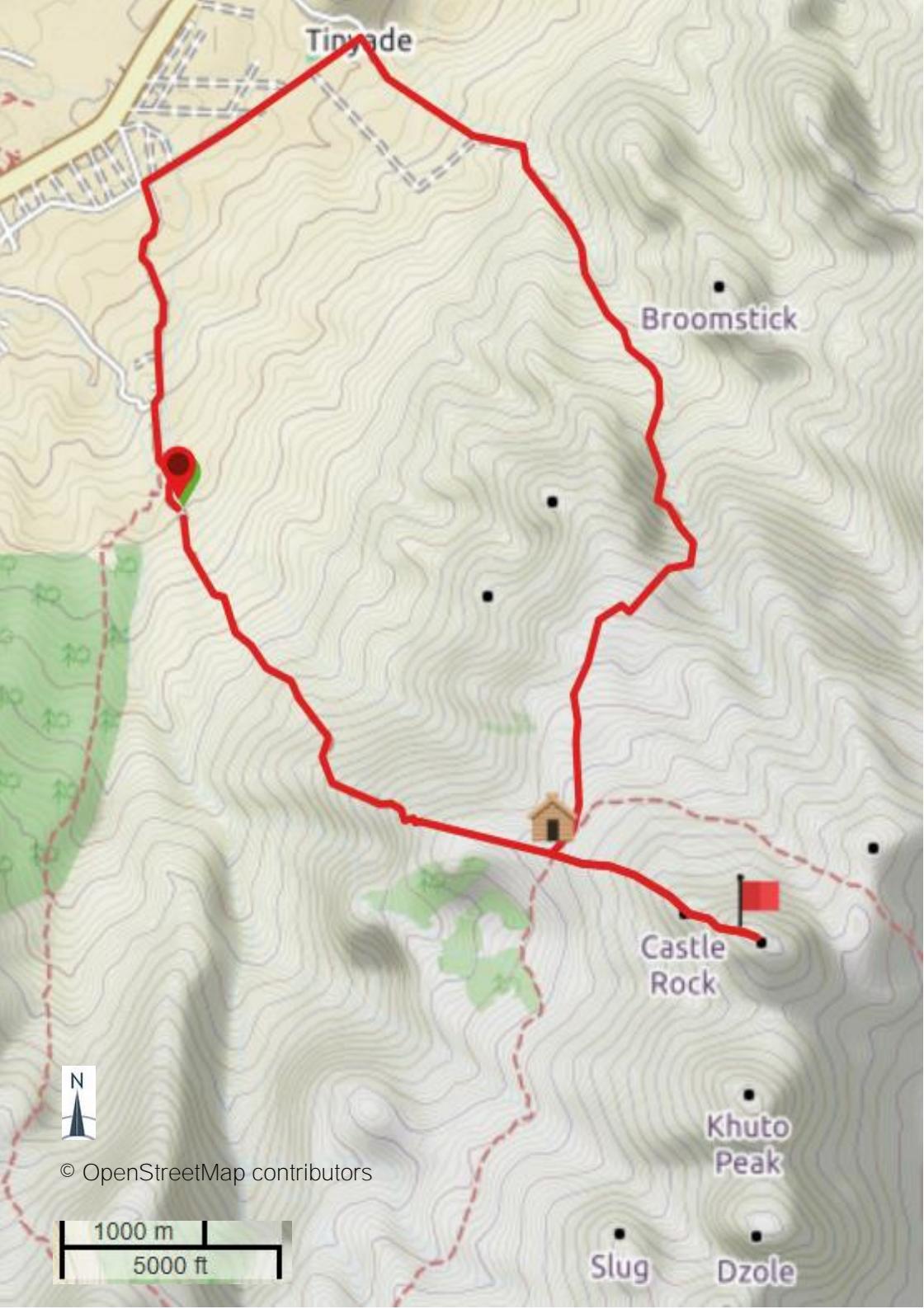
The route starts and ends at Thuchila Lodge. From Mulanje town (Chitakale), take the left turn onto the dirt road at InfoMulanje, and follow for about 28km to Thuchila.

There is a guides and porters station by the market in Kambenje Village, marked with a sign on the right-hand side of the road just before the main bridge. The guide will direct you to Thuchila Lodge; it is a short distance further on the main road before turning right through fields and woods.



A narrow squeeze on the way to Nandalanda summit





Chagaru Peak

Chagaru peak is on the northern fringe of the massif, offering views towards Zomba Mountain, Lake Chilwa and Mchese Mountain. The peak involves some hard scrambling and a narrow cave with a precarious entrance.

This is a scenic route from Tinyade to the upper reaches of the Ruo Basin with the grasslands surrounding Chinzama Hut. Chinzama peak is equally accessible on this route.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|----------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Chinzama |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 3 | 25 | 2,100 | 2 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Tinyade Estate up Lukulezi path to Chinzama Hut (6-7 hours).

Day 2: Chagaru peak (4 hours) and return down the Jungle Route (3 hours).

This walk could also be enjoyed as a 3-day trip, with a second night at Chinzama Hut making for a much more relaxed itinerary.

Route Description

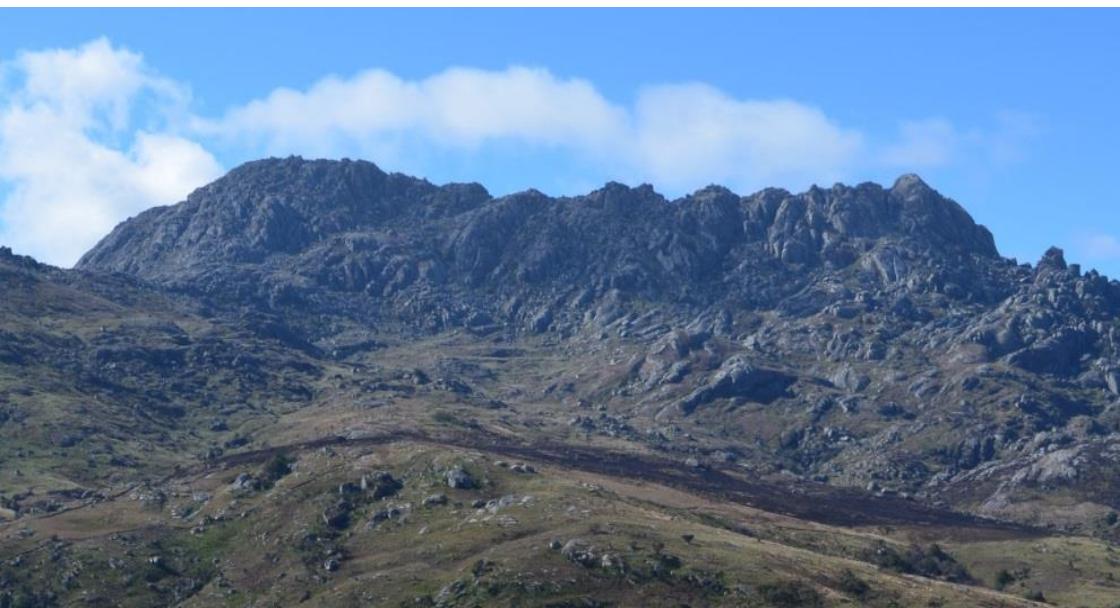
Day 1: The Lukulezi path provides a scenic and well-watered route, though not as direct as the Jungle Route.

From Tinyade Estate the path ascends gradually up the valley through woodland for 3-4 kms, crossing small streams but staying above the main Lukulezi river. The path bears right and begins to steepen before reaching a series of streams from a high waterfall. The path now zig-zags steeply up the mountain side, becoming gentler towards the top (4 hours).

Upon reaching the firebreak at the top, turn left and follow it around the base of Nandalanda. The path rises gently, crossing a section with slabs (precarious when wet), to a pass at 2,300m. Moving over the watershed takes you into the Ruo Basin – it is another 3km of undulating but steady walking to Chinzama Hut. The final approach drops down to cross the Ruo river and steeply back up to the hut.

Day 2: Chagaru peak – ‘The Big Dog’ in Chichewa – has a long serrated top, with the main summit on the right-hand end (as viewed from Chinzama Hut). The summit is accessed from the boulder strewn gully to its left. At one point, boulders totally bar the gully; enter the cave and take a precarious step across a gap to emerge on the other side. Continue up the gully to the col and bear right; a groove in the rocks will take you to the final scramble for the summit.

The summit of Chagaru is at the right-hand end of the serrated top



The most direct route from the hut to the peak crosses the Ruo and then follows hunters' trails upwards through a complexity of small valleys and boulders towards the gully.

The route marked with red paint begins on the firebreak about 1km west of Chinzama Hut; start off following a broad ridge before crossing a stream and moving up on rock ramps to the gully. This is a good option to descend on if continuing the descent on the Jungle Route.

A guide familiar with the peak is invaluable. The Frank Eastwood guidebook also provides useful details.

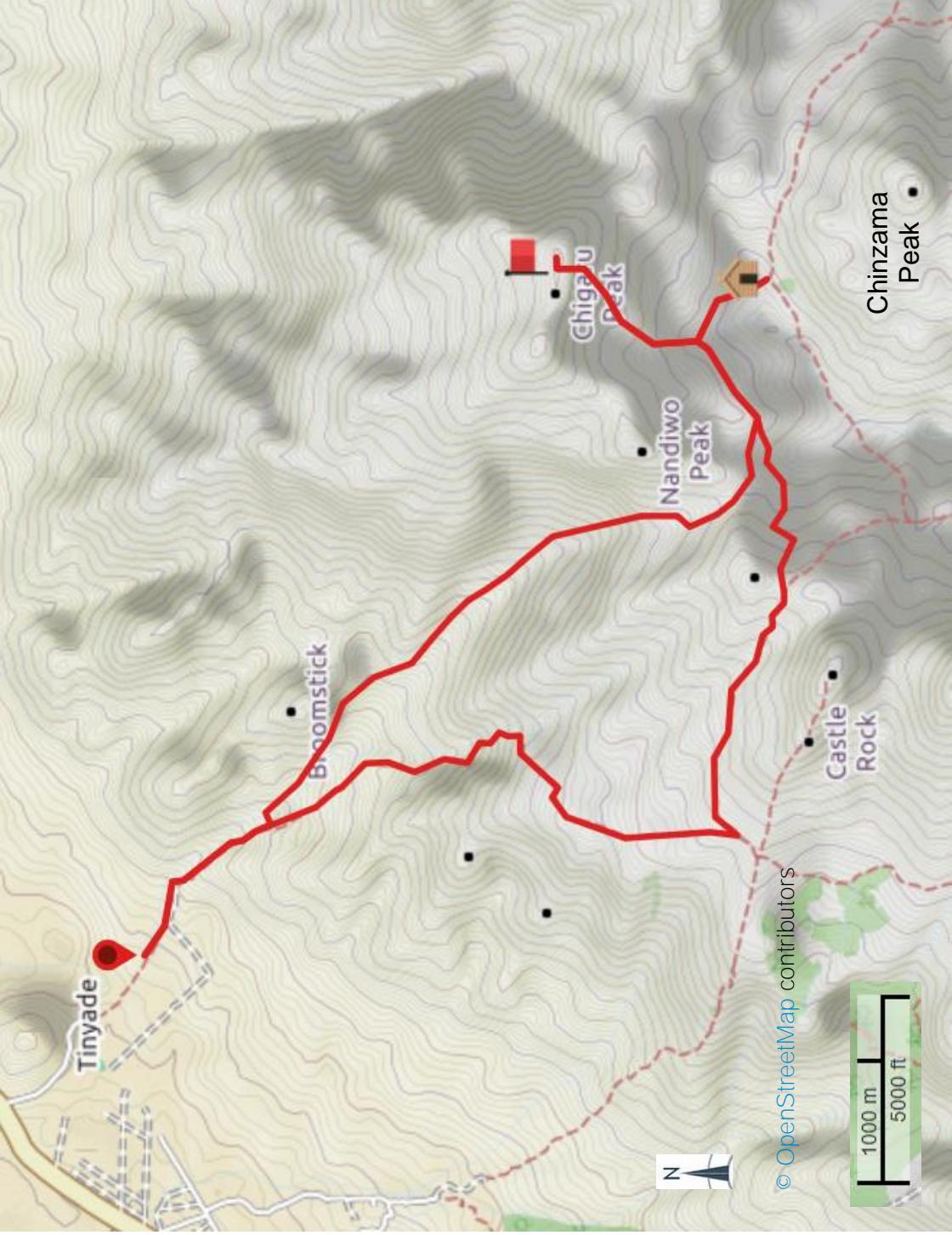
The Jungle Route is the most direct way back to Tinyade Estate (4 hours). Follow the firebreak back towards Thuchila Hut and turn right, crossing the grassy saddle with Nandiwo peak's south ridge on your right. The path tracks the river closely all the way back to Tinyade, with a crossing at both the upper and lower parts. It is steep and loose under foot at times.

Alternative routes

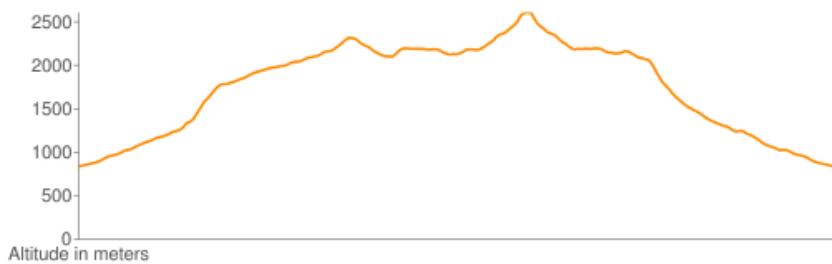
Chinzama Hut and Chagaru are also commonly accessed from the Lujeri side, moving up through the Ruo valley (see 'The Ruo Loop' route description). Sombani Hut and Madzeka Hut are three and four hours away respectively.

Alternative peaks

Chinzama peak (2,663m. 4 hours. Difficulty, 2) is a rounded protuberance with rock slabs leading up on every side. From Chinzama Hut the path crosses a stream and goes up to the head of the valley. Continue on the firebreak for 1 km or so before turning right and crossing grass to the rock slabs. Ascend the slabs and cross a deep vegetated gully with a couple of tricky steps. Continue up the steep slabs to reach the summit; a jumble of boulders on a broad flat slab. There is a delicate manoeuvre to sit atop the highest boulder.



Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

The route starts and ends at Tinyade Estate, just past Thuchila. From Mulanje town (Chitakale), take the left turn onto the dirt road at InfoMulanje, and follow for about 28km to Thuchila.

There is a guides and porters station by the market in Kambenje Village, marked with a sign on the right-hand side of the road just before the main bridge. The guide will direct you to Thuchila Lodge; it is approximately 2km further on the main road (passing the turn to Thuchila Lodge). The turning is on the right just before the small cone that is Tinyade hill.



Namasile Peak

The view from the summit of Namasile is exceptional – a grand panorama of Mount Mulanje's highest peaks. It is also the most accessible of all the peaks; a relatively short ascent to the plateau and an easy scramble up to the summit make for an excellent weekend.

Also approached from Sombani Hut is Matambale, arguably the hardest scramble of all Mount Mulanje's peaks. The nearby Mulosa Pools may also tempt you to spend another night at the hut.

The access road to the start of the walk is rough and may be difficult in the rainy season.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|---------|
| ✓ | - | ✓ | Sombani |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 2 | 16 | 1,800 | 2 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Fort Lister to Sombani Hut (3 hours).

Day 2: Namasile peak (3-4 hours) and back down to Fort Lister (3 hours).



Namasile basking in the late afternoon glow

Route Description

Day 1: The route starts from the Forestry Office at Fort Lister - located at the top of the pass, this starting point is more than 200m higher than any other route onto the mountain. Whilst undoubtedly steep, this way offers the easiest access to Mount Mulanje's plateau and huts.

The path begins gently, reaching a stream after 20 minutes. From here the broad red earth path climbs through woodland for about one hour – pick the gentler zig-zagging trail or the direct way up the middle. A small fire-lookout at the top of the shoulder provides a nice resting spot with fine views across to Mchese Mountain and the plains of Mozambique.

The path then winds gently round into a valley, passing a cedar nursery and onto footbridges across a stream. It then climbs steeply up the far side of the valley, bearing right and then left to the top.

Upon reaching the plateau Namasile and Matambale proudly present themselves. The flat valley spread out between is Sombani Basin, with the hut is on the left-hand side less than 2 km gentle walk away.

Day 2: Namasile (2,685m) stands grandly in front of Sombani Hut appearing deceptively inaccessible.

Set out on the path leading down to Fort Lister, soon crossing the stream and bearing left onto a firebreak. Move onto gentle slabs and head up towards the major rock wall. The path skirts close to the edge of the impressive fluted wall and enters a broad gully. Shortly before reaching the top of the gully bear left.

The path clammers its way through a collection of giant boulders surrounded by dense bush. Beyond this it is steep grass and boulder slopes all the way to the summit. Namasile is in a prize position; the panorama from the summit includes all of Mount Mulanje's main peaks.

The standard route back to Sombani Hut retraces the same path, although there is another route (indicated with a red dashed line on the map). This picks its way down a rocky ridge, bearing left into a col and down over rough ground to join the main path in Sombani Basin.

The nearby Mulosa Pools are some of the largest on Mount Mulanje and well worth a side trip. The pools are about 3 km (one hour) from Sombani Hut, heading along the firebreak towards Chinzama / Madzeka before turning off left and over a rise.

Alternative routes

A clear path exists from the village in Fort Lister directly up to the plateau (further west than the main route). A large portion is under the cover of woodland, and the top section is a great scramble over steep rock. This can be combined with the small but dramatic Litakala peak.

Alternative peaks

Matambale peak (2,643m, 5 hours, Difficulty 5) is a walled fortress, seemingly impenetrable when viewed from below. The path up follows a firebreak towards the cliffs, turning right up a steep grassy slope to a gully. Exit the gully and cross a boulder field, then a difficult scramble up a steep, narrowly-fluted wall and a steep corner to reach the summit. It is a tricky crossing to a second summit, which is arguably no higher.

Masasa (2,453m, 6-7 hours, Difficulty 3) is hidden away in the shadow of Matambale – it is a long slog around the side before you even see Masasa. Then cross a deep river valley before starting the hike up the ridge on the right of the peak. Break out across grassy slopes to a steep gully on the back side of the peak. The summit is a narrow ridge with a dramatic collection of boulders and superb views of Matambale.

Litakala (2,308m, 4-5 hours, Difficulty 2) is a dramatic rocky peak jutting out of the plateau over the Fort Lister Gap. The base is about

The grand panorama from the summit of Namasile



1.5 hours walk from Sombani Hut, following faint hunters' tracks. The route up is short but steep over grass and rocks. There is a direct route down to Fort Lister from near Litakala.

Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

The route starts from the Forestry Office at Fort Lister (the site of a British fort built in the late 1800's to oppose the slave trade). The Fort Lister Gap is a high pass between the Mulanje Massif and the wild Mchese Mountain. The 8km road from Phalombe up to Fort Lister Gap is steep and rough – a vehicle with high ground clearance is sensible and a 4WD is required after heavy rains. The turning for the Forestry Office is signposted a short distance after the village on the right-hand side.

From Blantyre, Phalombe is most quickly reached via Chiradzulu – from Limbe head towards Zomba, turn right about 10km and pass Chiradzulu town, later turning right at the Four Ways roundabout.

A more scenic route is via Chitakale (Mulanje town) and along the dirt road skirting around the edge of the mountain.





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Fort Lissier

Litakala
Peak

Namasile

Fire Break

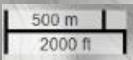
Fire Break

Fire Break

Matambale
Peak

Mulosa
Pools

Masasa
Peak



Manene Peak

Peer into Mozambique from Manene (2,650m) - the peak stands alone at the edge of a long ridge at the extremity of the massif.

Madzeka is a much-loved hut at a fabulous location on the banks of the Little Ruo. The cliff-hugging path that takes you there includes a series of wooden ladders and a spectacular view across to a high waterfall.

The scenic approach to the trail head through Lujeri Tea Estate and Ndaonetsa village is of unrivalled beauty.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|---------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Madzeka |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 3 | 24 | 2,100 | 2 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Lujeri Shed 3 to Madzeka Hut (4-5 hours)

Day 2: Madzeka Hut to Minunu peak (5-6 hours) and down to Shed 3 (3 hours)

This walk could also be enjoyed as a 3-day trip, with a second night at the hut making for a much more relaxed itinerary.



Manene peak is at the end of a long ridge

Route Description

Day 1: Park your vehicle at a junction on the road about half-way between Shed 3 and the Lujeri hydro-electric station. Cross the Ruo river on a steel footbridge and arrive in Ndaonetsa village – the children are likely to give you a warm welcome. You may also wish to start from Shed 3 in which case the guide will lead on a direct route to the village.

Walk along the red path boulevards of Ndaonetsa set amongst the fields of the small-holder tea farmers. The Ruo valley is the wettest side of the mountain and allows farmers to grow pineapples, bananas, mangos and avocados. There are many paths criss-crossing through the village and surrounding fields and it would be easy to misplace the route without a guide.

Note the impressive Madzeka waterfall where the Little Ruo falls off a cliff from the plateau; the route picks an improbable line above and left of it. As you leave the fields behind the path climbs steeply and persistently up the mountain side. The higher section has numerous wooden ladders to help negotiate the cliff-hugging path. A huge

boulder perched on the hillside facing the waterfall offers a spectacular viewpoint and good spot for a break.

Continue steeply up for a short distance before traversing towards the valley. Cross slanting slabs (slippery when wet), and enter a forest and easier ground. Manene peak becomes visible at the head of a long straight valley opposite. Cross two streams before arriving to Madzeka Hut.

Day 2: Cross the stream below the hut and climb on a firebreak to join the ridge between Nayawani North and South. The route follows the straight ridge undulating over Nayawani South and the poetically named “The Turd”. The ridge can be followed direct with a scramble up a rock wall, or with slight detours to avoid the difficulty.

The final ascent onto the summit requires a moderate scramble, crossing a small ravine and climbing slabs up to the summit beacon. The summit is flanked by cliffs on the south-east side, giving a great vantage point over a large area of forestry and to Mozambique beyond. Return to the hut along the same route.

The descent from Madzeka Hut is a short and steep 3 hours. A minor detour can be taken from the main path to the sacred Mbiya Pools – a series of bowl-shaped hollows fed by mini waterfalls in the lower section of the river. The path returns through Ndaonetsa village where there is a footbridge crossing the Ruo into the Lujeri Estate and the nearby Shed 3.



Madzeka Hut poised over the Little Ruo river



Nayawani
North

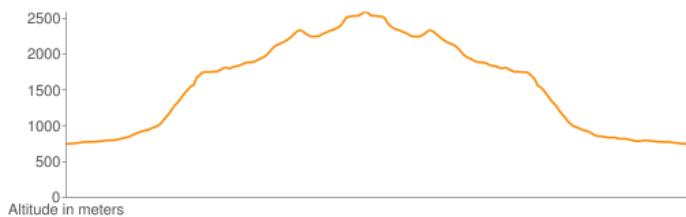
Nayawani
South

Horseshoe
Peak

The
Turd

Manene
Little
Manene

Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

The Lujeri guides and porters are based at Shed 3, deep inside the Lujeri Tea Estate. The maze of red dirt roads winding through the tea fields can be difficult to navigate. Turn off the M2 at the signpost for Lujeri Head Office and stay on this road all the way to the numerous buildings of the Estate Office. Bear left past the diesel pumps and after about 1 km turn right over the Lujeri river. Take the left at the entrance to the Tea Factory and hairpin left again at the next junction. Keeping straight, Shed 3 is some 3-4 km ahead.

A map of the Lujeri Estate is attached to the Mbiya Pools route description (page 29).



Chambe Peak

Stand atop mighty Chambe peak and peer down the highest cliff face in Africa. Chambe peak (2,538m) is renowned as one of the toughest, but most rewarding summits on Mount Mulanje. The unrivalled megalith stands alone on the western reach of the massif, towering above the plateau that has formed a natural basin 4km in diameter.

This 3-day hike ascends to the basin on the Skyline and returns down Chapaluka. Finish up with a dip in the waterfall and pools on the Likhubula river.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|--------------------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Chambe or France's |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 5 | 25 | 2,100 | 3 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Likhubula Forestry Station up the Skyline to Chambe Hut / France's Cottage (3-4 hours)

Day 2: The Chambe peak traverse (7-8 hours)

Day 3: Across Chambe Basin and down the Chapaluka path via the Likhubula Falls (4 hours).



Peering down the east face of Chambe Peak

Route Description

Day 1: The route starts and ends at the Likhubula Forestry Office, where you can park and arrange guides.

From the Forestry Office you can visit the Likhubula waterfall, an easy hour's walk up the valley. The waterfall is about 15m high and at its base is a beautiful pool, popular for swimming on a hot day. From the waterfall you can either continue up to Chambe by the Chapaluka path, or return to the Forestry Office for the Skyline path described below.

Take the Skyline path to the Chambe basin - about 3 hours, with 1,000m of ascent. Look out for the cable runner – the ‘Skyline’ - that was used to transport pine harvested on the basin down the mountain.

After crossing a stream, the lower section is a slog directly up on a broad path through woodland. The upper part has wide views as the path traverses the precipitous higher reaches of the Lichenya valley. Breathe a sigh of relief upon abruptly reaching the level ground of Chambe basin. Enjoy views of Chambe's dramatic east face over the next 2 to 3 km of relatively flat ground.

Day 2: The west face of Chambe is the highest cliff face in Africa - a dramatic monolith stretching some 1,700 m from the plains direct to the summit. The east face is equally precipitous though only some 500 m above the flatland of Chambe Basin. The path straddles the ridge separating these two faces.

The typical route onto Chambe goes up the East Ridge and back down the same way – this is a serious undertaking in its own right. The traverse via the West Ridge ascent is less well known with no distinct path or markings; make sure your guide is familiar with the route or carry a GPS. If in doubt, settle for the already challenging ascent up the East Ridge.

Day 3: It is 2-3 km over easy ground to the edge of the plateau. The top of the Chapaluka path is found near where the stream leaves the plateau (and where a weir has created a small pool). The path drops steeply down through forest into a narrow valley with imposing cliffs ahead to meet the stream. The river scenery is beautiful – with lush forest and white water forcing its way through large boulders.

The route has numerous boulder-hopping crossings of the Chapaluka and Namingazi streams. The streams become difficult to ford during the rains and impassable after particularly heavy downpours.

The path joins the Chapaluka dirt road that extends high up the Likhubula valley. Follow this through covered woodland all the way back to the Forestry Office compound. A stop-off at the Likhubula Falls (*Dziwe la Nkhala*) is well worth it. Likewise, the excellent natural pools next to the CCAP campsite are also a great spot for a swim.

Just before arriving back at the Forestry Office, the path crosses the Likhubula river at a set of pools – you may well be tempted to take a dip!

Alternative routes

A simple return down the Skyline is slightly faster than following the Chapaluka trail. The Porters Race Loop route is a good option for a longer third day – this crosses onto the main massif and touches the edge of the Lichenya plateau (with good views over to Chambe Basin) before descending on the opposite valley wall to the ascent path.

Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

The route starts and ends at the Likhubula Forest Office. From Mulanje town (Chitakale), take the left turn onto the dirt road at InfoMulanje, and follow for about 10km to Likhubula. The road passes through a number of tea estates and around Chambe. Marvel at Chambe's west face – Africa's tallest single rock face. Upon reaching Likhubula village, take the right turn immediately after the bridge and

go up the track to find the Forestry Office. Guides and porters can be arranged at the office.



1000 m

5000 ft

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Sapitwa Peak from Thuchila

Sapitwa is the highest of Mount Mulanje's peaks, standing at 3,002m. Its commanding position at the centre of the massif affords spectacular panoramic views of the massif. The hike involves some hard scrambling and the top section can be treacherously difficult to follow in bad weather.

This is a 3-day circular route from Thuchila - the relatively gentle ascent is also the most direct route to Chisepo Hut and Sapitwa, and the return passes the mystical Spirit Dam and Falls.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|---------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Chisepo |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 4 | 24 | 2,300 | 3 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Thuchila Lodge up the 'Suicide path' to Chisepo Hut (5 hours)

Day 2: Sapitwa peak and back to Chisepo Hut (5-6 hours)

Day 3: Chisepo Hut down Roots path to Thuchila Lodge (4 – 5 hours)

Route Description

Day 1: The Suicide path is something of a misnomer - it is a relatively steady route up, becoming a steep scramble in a gully only on the uppermost section. It would however get desperate during heavy rains when the gully becomes a torrent of water.



Sapitwa peak (centre) and Nakodzwe peak (left), viewed from Chisepo peak

The route starts by crossing the Thuchila river and rises steadily up the valley, following the line of the river through woodland for 4km. The path becomes steeper before two river crossings and then climbing up the valley side between cliffs. The upper portion enters a steep and slippery gully that tops out to a fantastic view.

Follow the firebreak around the side of Chisepo peak; before long Sapitwa and Nakodzwe will be visible. The firebreak drops down to cross a river and climbs up to join the path from Thuchila to Chisepo Hut.

Day 2: Devote the day to scaling Mount Mulanje's highest peak, Sapitwa. From Chisepo Hut, the path climbs upwards through bush and boulders to reach steep rock slabs. Continue up the slabs which form the broad north-west ridge of Sapitwa. From the top of the slabs it is a further 1.5 km to the summit scrambling over a boulder strewn wilderness, riddled with gullies, squeeze gaps and giant monoliths. The final clamber up to the summit beacon is particularly interesting.

The return to Chisepo Hut is along the same route. The hike involves some hard scrambling and the top section can be treacherously difficult to follow in bad weather.

Day 3: Start out on the main trail to Thuchila Hut, following a firebreak and crossing two small river valleys to the Roots path turn-off (after about 1½ hours). Roots starts on a firebreak along the top of a protruding shoulder, before entering forest and the sharp descent. The path has some tricky slabs to negotiate, where grabbing a handy tree root may just help.

The end of the steep section is marked by a river full of boulders; cross here and move down on easier ground through high grass. After some 30 minutes, cross the river at a series of plunge pools and funnels shaped by the water. A short distance below here is a high waterfall - the 15-20m high cascade falls into a huge pool formed by the mystical Spirit Dam. High cliffs provide a natural diving board for the brave.

Continuing down on the left bank, this section has narrow segments of path with a steep drop to the river below. Cross the river a final time, before a gentle rise and the final stretch through woodland back to Thuchila Lodge.

Additional peaks

West peak (2,893m, 1 hour, Difficulty 3). A short detour from the path to Sapitwa near the start of the boulder field past the top of the slabs. Includes moderate scrambling.

Nakodzwe peak (2,964m, 8 hours, Difficulty 5). Nakodzwe is the second highest of Mount Mulanje's peaks and even tougher than Sapitwa. It is a long slog from Chisepo Hut, with 2 hours on rough path to a pass from where the main ascent begins. Gain altitude on steep grass slopes and then skirt around the base of high slabs. Negotiate short rock walls, slabs, squeeze holes and boulders on the approach to the peak – a move in a corner onto a slab is particularly tricky.

Chisepo peak (2,377m, 2 hours, Difficulty 2). In front of Chisepo Hut is a more relaxed peak with fantastic views, though no distinct path.



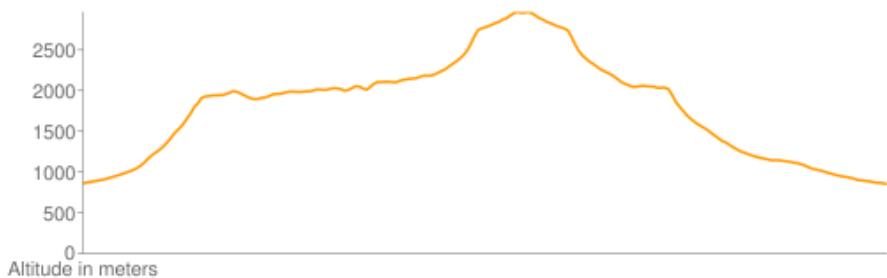
The top of Roots path with views of Chambe in the distance

Alternative routes

The hike could also be done in the reverse direction. Either modify or avoid the route after heavy rains when the crossings of the Thuchila river and the Suicide path effectively become impassable. The bad section of the Suicide path can be avoided by continuing to the head of the Thuchila valley (at the junction with Chambe and Lichenya), then picking up the main trail to Chisepo Hut.

A good dry route alternative to descending the Roots path is the Elephant's Head from Thuchila Hut. It avoids the river crossings but is brutally steep. Thuchila Hut gives good access to Nandalanda, Khuto and Dzole peaks, and Elephant's Head hosts spectacular sunsets.

Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

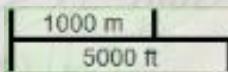
The route starts and ends at Thuchila Lodge. From Mulanje town (Chitakale), take the left turn onto the dirt road at InfoMulanje, and follow for about 28km to Thuchila.

There is a guides and porters station by the market in Kambenje Village, marked with a sign on the right-hand side of the road just before the main bridge. The guide will direct you to Thuchila Lodge; it is a short distance further on the main road before turning right through fields and woods.





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Sapitwa Peak from Likhubula

Sapitwa is the highest of Mount Mulanje's peaks, standing at 3,002m. Its commanding position at the centre of the massif affords spectacular panoramic views. The climb involves some hard scrambling and the top section can be treacherously difficult to follow in bad weather.

This is a 3-day hike from Likhubula and crossing Chambe Basin. It is the most popular approach route to Sapitwa.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|-----------------------------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Chisepo, Chambe or France's |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 4 | 31 | 2,200 | 3 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Climb up the Skyline from Likhubula Forestry Office (3 hours), then across Chambe Basin and on up to Chisepo Hut (2 hours).

Day 2: Sapitwa peak and back to Chisepo Hut (5 – 6 hours), then on to Chambe Hut or France's Cottage (2 hours).

Day 3: Across Chambe Basin and down the Chapaluka path via Dziwe la Nkhalamba (the Likhubula Falls) (4 hours).

Route Description

Day 1: The route starts and ends at the Likhubula Forestry Office, where you can park and arrange guides.



Nakodzwe peak seen from high above the clouds on Sapitwa summit

Take the Skyline path to the plateau at Chambe basin - about 3 hours, with 1,000m of steep ascent on a well-trodden path. Look out for the cable runner – the ‘Skyline’ - that was used to transport harvested pine down the mountain.

After crossing a stream, the lower section is a slog directly up on a broad path through woodland. The upper part has wide views as the path traverses the precipitous higher reaches of the Lichenya valley. Breathe a sigh of relief upon reaching the abruptly level ground of Chambe basin whilst enjoying views of Chambe’s dramatic east face.

Follow the main path towards Chambe Hut – part of the road network of the former forestry activities on the basin – and branch right after about 500m onto the short cut to Chisepo. The path rises for the next 2 km to the edge of Chambe basin where it connects to the main massif via the ‘knife-edge’. As you leave Chambe you can peer down the Thuchila valley with fantastic views of the trio of peaks - Dzole, Khuto and Nandalanda.

It is a steep drop down onto the knife-edge that divides the Thuchila and Likhubula watersheds. Continue straight ahead at the crossroads of paths at the saddle, and climb steeply for 1km to a pass between North Peak and Chisepo Peak. From here it is a gentle stroll to Chisepo Hut, crossing a broad stream just before the hut.

Chisepo is the busiest of all huts on the mountain and in a wood scarce area – visitors are requested to use sparingly when cooking and heating water.

Day 2: Devote the day to scaling Mount Mulanje's highest peak, Sapitwa. From Chisepo Hut, the path climbs upwards through bush and boulders to reach steep rock slabs. Continue up the slabs which form the broad north-west ridge of Sapitwa. From the top of the slabs it is a further 1.5 km to the summit scrambling over a boulder strewn wilderness, riddled with gullies, squeeze gaps and giant monoliths. The final clamber up to the summit beacon is particularly interesting.

The return to Chisepo Hut is along the same route. The hike involves some hard scrambling and the top section can be treacherously difficult to follow in bad weather.

The second night can be spent at either Chisepo Hut or on Chambe (Chambe Hut or France's Cottage, 2-3 hours). Moving onto Chambe takes in more of the mountain, and gives more time on day 3 to explore the Chapaluka path. Return along the path towards Likhubula, and take the right at the junction on Chambe basin for the huts – it is a further 2km of steady descent. The huts have great views of Chambe's east face and are close to the various houses used by the former forestry staff.

Day 3: It is 2-3 km over easy ground to the edge of the plateau. The top of the Chapaluka path is found near where the stream leaves the plateau (and where a weir has created a small pool). The path drops steeply down through forest into a narrow valley with imposing cliffs ahead to meet the stream. The river scenery is beautiful – with lush forest and white water forcing its way through large boulders.

The route has numerous boulder-hopping crossings of the Chapaluka and Namingazi streams. The streams become difficult to ford during the rains and impassable after particularly heavy downpours.

The path joins the Chapaluka dirt road that extends high up the Likhubula valley. Follow this through covered woodland all the way back to the Forestry Office compound. A stop-off at the Likhubula

Falls (Dziwe la Nkhalamba) is well worth it. Likewise, the excellent natural pools next to the CCAP campsite are also a great spot for a swim.

Additional peaks

West Peak (2,893m, 1 hour, Difficulty 3). A short detour from the path to Sapitwa near the start of the boulder field past the top of the slabs. Includes moderate scrambling.

Nakodzwe (2,964m, 8 hours, Difficulty 5). Nakodzwe is the second highest of Mount Mulanje's peaks and even tougher than Sapitwa. It is a long slog from Chisepo Hut, with 2 hours on rough path to a pass from where the main ascent begins. Gain altitude on steep grass slopes and then skirt around the base of high slabs. Negotiate short rock walls, slabs, squeeze holes and boulders on the approach to the peak – a move in a corner onto a slab is particularly tricky.

Chisepo peak (2,377m, 2 hours, Difficulty 2). In front of Chisepo Hut is a more relaxed peak with fantastic views, though no distinct path.

Sapitwa summit - the highest point in South-Central Africa



Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

Likhubula Forest Office is the base for this walk. From Mulanje town (Chitakale), take the left turn onto the dirt road at InfoMulanje, and follow for about 10km to Likhubula. After entering the Forestry Office compound, turn left and follow the dirt road to its end. Park the car just before a bridge crossing a river.

The Forestry Office will charge a park entry and vehicle entry fee. Expect to be approached by many people offering services for guiding and watching your vehicle.





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Sapitwa Peak on the Crater Path

The Crater path follows an excellent ridge with superb views of the Crater and Manga peak. Incredibly steep, exposed and often overgrown - it is the most challenging trail leading to the plateau.

Cross the Lichenya plateau and stay at either Hope's Rest Cottage or Lichenya Hut. The next day, summit Sapitwa – Mount Mulanje's highest peak - via West Peak on the rare Scorpion path. Complete with a dip in the Lichenya Pools and return down the Boma path.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|----------|
| ✓ | - | ✓ | Lichenya |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 5 | 41 | 2,500 | 3 |

View drone footage from an MCM group trip on the Crater and Lichenya Plateau from [Fly High Africa](#) (follow this link or search on You Tube).

Itinerary

Day 1: Mulanje boma to the mouth of the Crater and steeply up the knife-edge ridge to the plateau and on to Lichenya Hut

Day 2: Follow the Scorpion path to West Peak and on to Sapitwa, return the same route to Lichenya Hut



The desperately steep and exposed ridge on the Crater path

Day 3: Cross the Lichenya plateau to the Linje pools and descend the Boma path back to Mulanje boma.

Route Description

The route starts and ends in Mulanje boma. Parking can be arranged at the Golf Club or a hotel or lodge in the boma. A good guide who knows both the Crater and Scorpion paths is essential. Contact InfoMulanje for advice.

The path follows the Muloza river into the Crater, then up and along the sharp ridge to join the plateau suddenly. It is a new path cut by a group from Chipoka and Nkola villages. It is perhaps the most difficult walking route up to the plateau on the whole of Mount Mulanje.

The Crater mouth can be reached from various directions, depending where you start. The guide will take you for an hour or so through the roads that criss-cross the tea estate.

At the Crater mouth, the path crosses the Muloza river and moves up through the forest for some 20 minutes. After a second crossing of the



Crossing the plateau to Lichenya Hut with Sapitwa in the distance

Muloza river (the last chance to fill up water bottles), the path zig-zags sharply up the valley side to join the ridge at a saddle. This section is through thick forest and may well be heavily overgrown if not recently used. The path is treacherously loose underfoot in some parts.

The sharp ridge offers fantastic views down into the Crater and around the cliffs that define it. The path is steep and narrow in parts; the top section is the steepest, going direct up a grassy slab and finishing on the plateau. It is 3-3½ hours from the river to the plateau.

Crossing the rolling upland, the path follows fire-breaks to meet the Boma path as it joins the plateau. Take a right turn and make your way towards Lichenya Hut, about 1½ hours from the Crater rim.

Lichenya Hut is the biggest hut on the mountain, and popular with large groups. The CCAP hut, Hope's Rest Cottage – an older, more rustic hut – also sits on the Lichenya Plateau about one hour's walk from Lichenya Hut.

The Scorpion path to Sapitwa is rarely walked by trekkers; most people favour the shorter approach from Chisepo Hut. It is a long trek in via West Peak, and retraces the same route for the return. But it provides a satisfying traverse of the mountain.

From Lichenya Hut take the path going towards Chambe; at the top of the pass, turn right onto a firebreak (turning left is the Milk Run down to Likhubula). Follow the firebreak towards the lower end of the West Peak ridge. Upon meeting a perpendicular fire-break, the route cuts across open grass and rocks up to the broad south-west ridge of West Peak. Although some red paint markings are visible, the path is not distinct.

Upon joining the ridge, the path turns to the left and moves gently upward, until the final scramble for the summit.

Sapitwa is only 100m higher than West Peak, but the 1km between the two is a boulder field that requires careful navigation. The red route markings are regular, but not always easy to spot. The final ascent onto the summit requires a tricky pull up onto a boulder and squeeze through an assembly of rocks.

Return to Lichenya Hut via the same route, passing West Peak and back down the ridge. The walk takes 8-9 hours in total.

The final day is a short descent down the Boma path. If you're looking for a swim, the beautiful Lichenya Pools are a short but steep walk from the hut. The Linje Pools looking over the edge of the plateau beyond the Hope's Rest Cottage are another option, though they require a 2-3km detour on the way to the Boma path.

The Boma path drops steeply off the edge of the plateau, going directly down a grassy slab. The gradient eases after a river crossing, but does not give too much of a let-up for tired legs.

Additional peaks

Lichenya plateau hosts four smaller peaks. Chilemba is the highest and has great views over the plateau and Chambe basin. A nice

circuit can be made by passing Hope's Rest in one direction and via the top of the Milk Run for return - allow 3-4 hours.

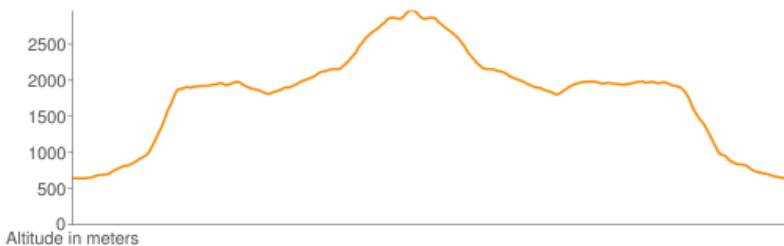
South Peak is most accessible from Lichenya Hut, though it is still a full day's walk to what is one of Mount Mulanje's most remote peaks.

Alternative routes

There is plenty to discover on the plateau – the Crater rim, Lichenya river and pools, and rolling grasslands. Hope's Rest Cottage and Lichenya Hut are both well situated to explore the area.

To avoid the tricky Crater path - there are many alternative routes onto the Lichenya plateau – the two paths from Nessa, the Milk Run from Likhubula or the Boma path.

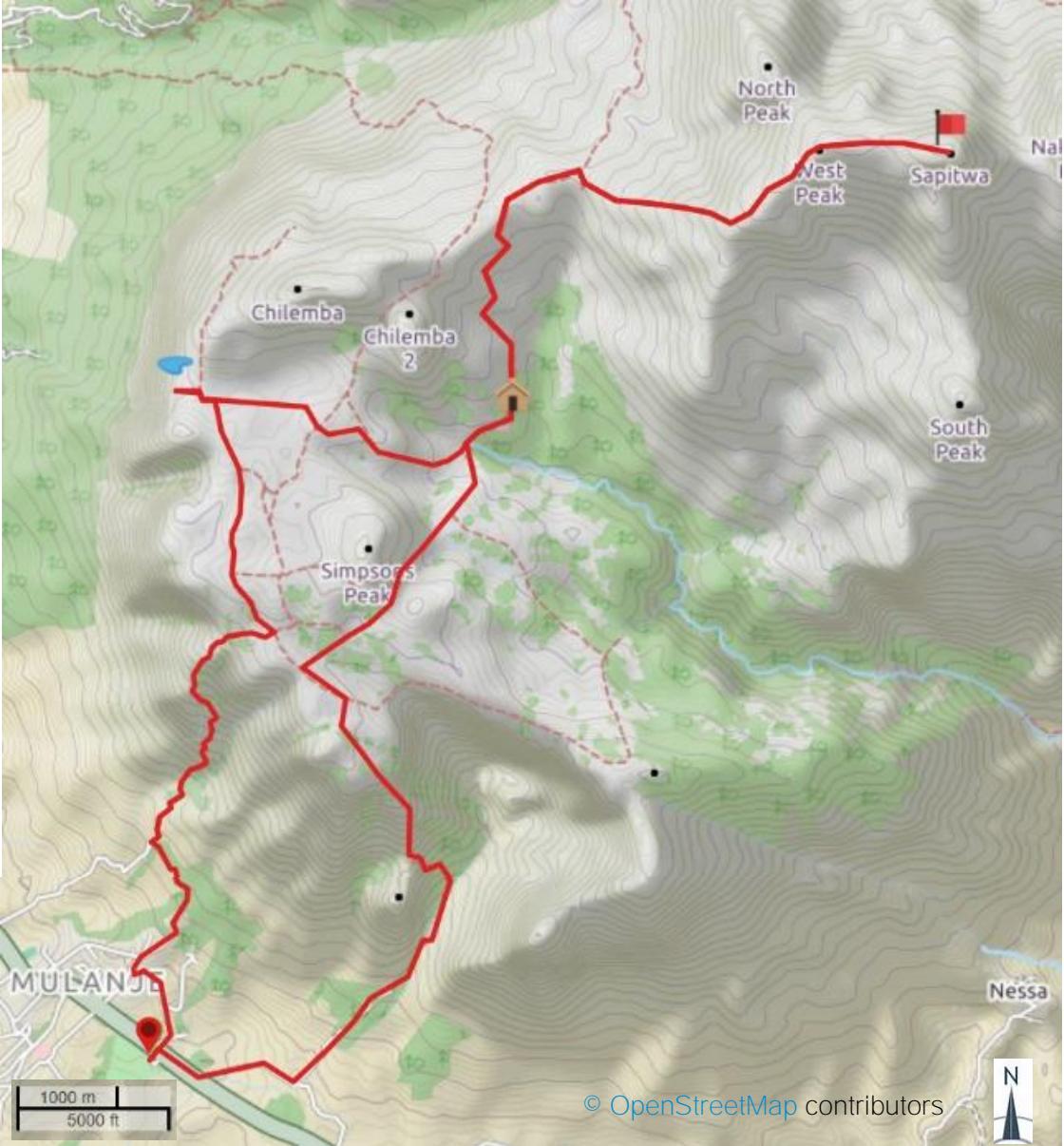
Altitude Profile



Getting there and away

The route starts and ends in Mulanje boma. Parking can be arranged at the Golf Club or a hotel or lodge in the boma. Guides can be arranged through infoMulanje.





The Ruo Loop

Scrambly peaks, spectacular waterfalls, and stunning pools combined with rolling grasslands and charming huts - the Ruo Loop provides the full Mount Mulanje experience.

This 4-day circular route starts and ends in the midst of the beautiful Lujeri Tea Estate. It enters the Ruo Gorge - a striking cleft running through the heart of Mount Mulanje.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|------------------------------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Minunu, Chinzama, Madzeka |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 3 | 36 | 2,500 | 4 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Lujeri Shed 3 to Minunu Hut (4-5 hours)

Day 2: Minunu Hut to Chagaru peak and Chinzama Hut (6 hours)

Day 3: Chinzama Hut to Chinzama peak and Madzeka Hut (6 hours)

Day 4: Madzeka Hut via Mbiya pools to Lujeri Shed 3 (3-4 hours)

The steep path from Madzeka to Shed 3 involves a series of ladders. If you are more sure of foot going up these rather than down, then



A fine view of Matambale and Masasa en route to Madzeka Hut

you may wish to do the loop in reverse; this would be an equally good option, though you may not feel as tempted to dip in the Mbiya Pools at the start of the walk.

Route Description

Day 1: Shed 3 is situated in the midst of tea fields near the mouth of the Ruo Gorge. Minunu Hut – the target for Day 1 – is high up the Ruo valley. Peer to the right of the gorge to see another high waterfall alongside the returning path from Madzeka Hut.

Follow the road from Shed 3 to the hydro-electric station (built in the 1930s and still powering Lujeri's operations). The path gently winds up the west side of the valley, through woodland and with occasional glimpses of the Ruo river. Cross a first tributary after about 3 km (this can become an impassable torrent immediately after heavy rains), and a second after a further 1 km. From here, it is a long steep climb up on sometimes loose soil. The top rewards you with a fantastic view of the Ruo pouring off the plateau. Minunu Hut is another 1 km along

relatively gentle ground, about 4-5 hours from the hydro-electric station.

Day 2: From Minunu Hut, set off up the Ruo valley towards Chinzama Hut. After some 2 km, go left at the junction towards Thuchila; then at the next junction - 1 km further - turn right along the firebreak. Take this for about 2 km to a non-descript turn off: from here, the route to Chagaru crosses grassland and rock ramps, following red paint markings.

Chagaru is a long serrated top, with the main summit on the right-hand end. The summit is accessed from the boulder-strewn gully to its left. At the point where boulders totally bar the gully, enter the cave and take a precarious step across the gap, thus emerging on the other side. An alternative is to wriggle on your back up through the narrow (but short) tunnel. Continue up the gully to the col and bear right; a groove in the rocks will take you to the summit (2,660m).

To descend, return down the gully and move down the rock ramps. Returning to Chinzama can be done by returning to the main path via the firebreak, or using the more direct route of hunters' trails.

Day 3: Chinzama peak (2,663 m) is a rounded protuberance with rock slabs leading up on every side. From Chinzama Hut the path crosses a stream and goes up to the head of the valley. Continue on the firebreak for 1 km or so, before turning right and crossing grass to the rock slabs. Ascend the slabs and cross a deep vegetated gully with a couple of tricky steps. Continue up the steep slabs to reach the summit; a jumble of boulders on a broad flat slab. There is a delicate manoeuvre to sit atop the highest boulder.

Either return the same route down to the firebreak, or take a direct cut towards the path for Madzeka Hut. Upon reaching the firebreak it is a further 2 hours of gentle plateau walking to arrive at Madzeka Hut. This hut is conveniently located next to fresh pools in the Madzeka river (sometimes called the Little Ruo).

Day 4: The route down from Madzeka is a short and steep 3 hours. After quickly crossing a tributary and moving over slanting slabs

(slippery when wet), the gradient steepens dramatically. A series of wooden ladders are placed to help negotiate the cliff-hugging path. A large rocky outcrop offers glorious views looking across to the Madzeka waterfall. Continue steeply down to the fields of the smallholder farmers on the periphery of the estate.

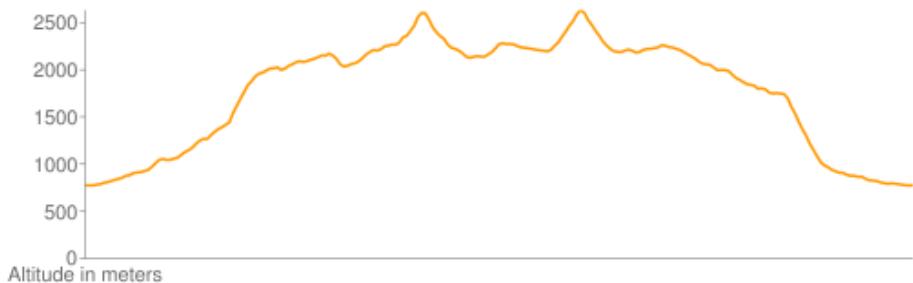
A short detour can be taken from the main path to the sacred Mbiya Pools – a series of bowl-shaped hollows fed by mini waterfalls. The path returns through Ndaonetsa village where there is a footbridge crossing the Ruo into the Lujeri Estate and the nearby Shed 3.

Alternative peaks

Dzole (2,715m. 4-5 hours. Difficulty, 3) is a direct scramble up impressive slabs from Minunu Hut. This peak would be an alternative to Chagaru on Day 2.

Manene peak (2,650m, 5-6 hours. Difficulty 3) is reached from Madzeka Hut (see full Route Description).

Altitude Profile





The Ruo falls drops off the plateau deep into the gorge below

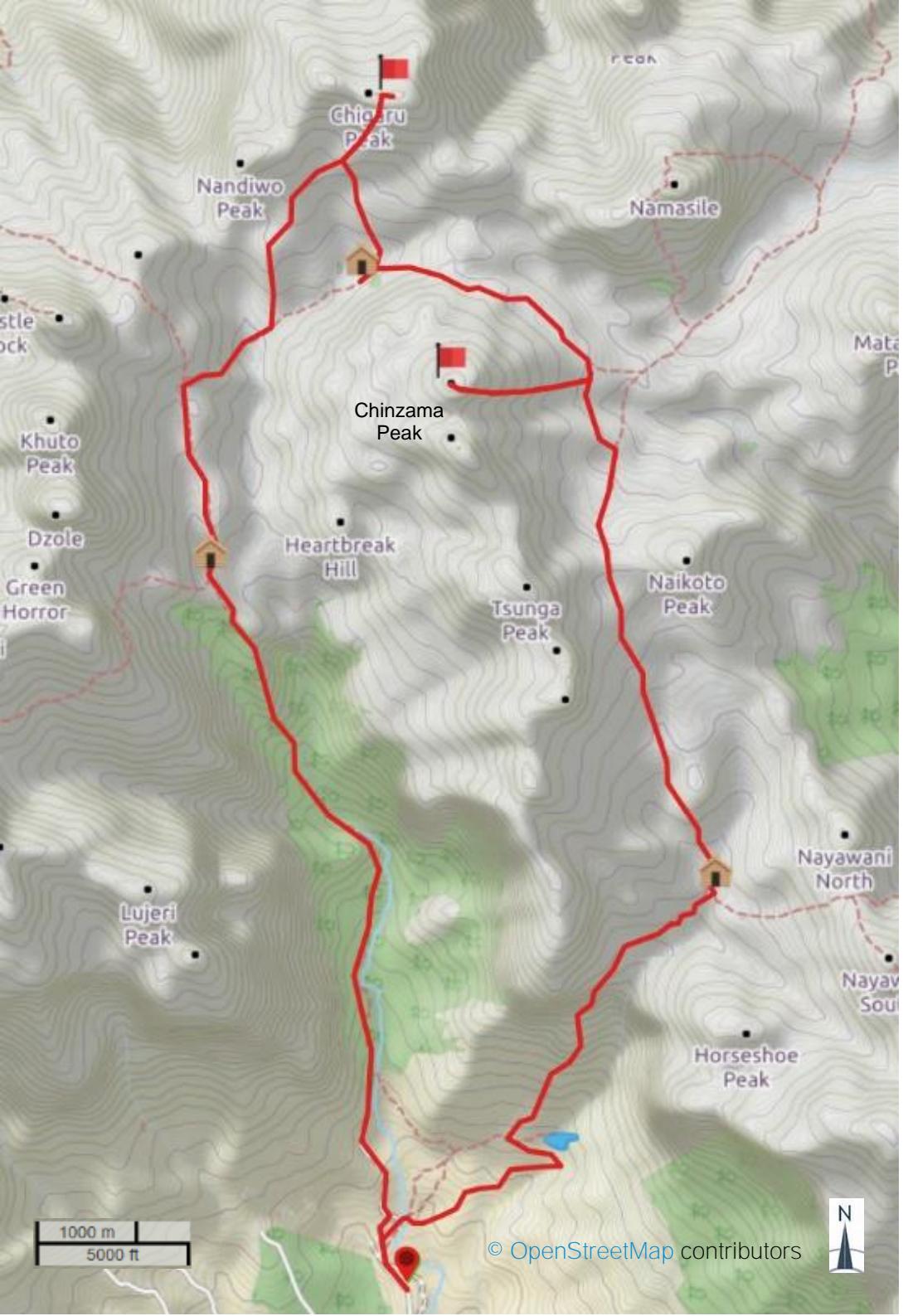
Getting there and away

The Lujeri guides and porters are based at Shed 3, deep inside the Lujeri Tea Estate. The maze of red dirt roads winding through the tea fields can be difficult to navigate, but it is a well known location if you get off track, so don't hesitate to ask!

Turn off the M2 at the signpost for Lujeri Head Office and stay on this road all the way to the numerous buildings of the Estate Office. Bear left past the diesel pumps and after about 1 km turn right over the Lujeri river. Take the left at the entrance to the Tea Factory and take a hairpin left again at the next junction. Keeping straight (following the power lines coming down from the hydro-electric station), Shed 3 is some 3-4 km ahead on the right.

A map of the Lujeri Tea Estate is attached to the Mbiya Pools route description (page 31).





The Grand Traverse

The Grand Traverse is an epic trek that crosses the full length of Mount Mulanje and touches Sapitwa, its highest point. The route takes you from Mulanje town on the south-west of the mountain to Phalombe on the north-east – making it a good option if you're reliant on public transport. It is proposed as a 5-day trek, though could be easily extended by adding any of the peaks along the route.

| Peaks | Waterfalls | Pools | Huts |
|-------|------------|-------|--|
| ✓ | - | ✓ | Lichenya, Chisepo, Thuchila, Chinzama, Sombani |

| Difficulty (1-5) | Distance (km) | Height gained (m) | Time (days) |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| 4 | 53 | 3,000 | 5 |

Itinerary

Day 1: Mulanje boma up to the plateau and Lichenya Hut (5 hours)

Day 2: Lichenya Hut to Chisepo Hut (4 to 5 hours)

Day 3: Sapitwa peak and on to Thuchila Hut (7-8 hours)

Day 4: Thuchila Hut to Sombani Hut via Chinzama Hut (6 hours)

Day 5: Sombani Hut down to Fort Lister (3 hours) and then Phalombe (2 hours)



The summit of Masasa is an exposed pinnacle

Route Description

Day 1: The route starts from Mulanje boma. Pick up the trail at Kara O'Mula – the former District Commissioner's house, now a hotel and restaurant.

The path begins by meandering along the upward edge of Chitakale Estate with glorious views across the tea fields. After some 500m, a sharp turn to the right starts the ascent to the plateau – a gruelling yet rewarding 3 hours with some great rock scrambling and views down to Mulanje town and on to Mozambique. A river crossing provides a good place to rest before the final climb. Care should be

taken on the top section, which is particularly steep; grass tufts provide foot and scramble holds up rock slabs.

At the top, you reach the Lichenya Plateau, perhaps the most expansive area of wood and grassland on the mountain. The route follows firebreaks across the rolling upland to Lichenya Hut, with views of Sapitwa and the vast surrounding high area ahead.

Lichenya Hut is the largest on Mount Mulanje and, as such, is popular with big groups. The Lichenya pools are a beautiful spot, though be warned that it is a steep descent from the hut, making the return trip to the hut arduous after your pleasant dip!

Day 2: From Lichenya Hut, the route gently climbs for around 3 km to the watershed and a right turn at the junction. This vicinity offers good views of Chambe peak and basin. The path crosses numerous streams as it traverses under North Peak, to arrive at the saddle connecting Chambe to the main massif. Take the right turn at this junction and climb steeply out of the forest to a pass. Upon reaching the pass it is a short and gentle approach to Chisepo Hut.

Day 3: Sapitwa is the highest of Mount Mulanje's peaks, standing at 3,002m. Its commanding position at the centre of the massif affords spectacular panoramic views. The climb involves some hard scrambling and the top section can be treacherously difficult to follow in bad weather.

From Chisepo Hut, the path climbs upwards through bush and boulders to reach steep rock slabs. Continue up the slabs which form the broad north-west ridge of Sapitwa. From the top of the slabs it is a further 1.5 km to the summit over a boulder strewn wilderness, riddled with gullies, gaps and giant monoliths. The return to Chisepo Hut is along the same route. From Chisepo, Thuchila Hut is some 3 hours further along an undulating firebreak.

Day 4: The route sets out to Chinzama Hut (2.5 hours), passing around the north side of Nandalanda peak and coming out onto the north-west side of the Ruo Basin. Follow the fire break through the grasslands moving parallel to the serrated flat ridge of Chagaru peak.

From Chinzama Hut it is a further 3 hours to Sombani Hut. Climb out of the Ruo catchment and see the Malosa Basin stretched out in front. The path moves down the right side of the valley with Chinzama peak on the right and Namasile on the left. Turn left at the junction and stroll the remaining 3 kms to Sombani Hut. The stunning Malosa Pools are about a 30-min detour from the junction.

Day 5: The route off the mountain drops from Sombani Hut to the village of Fort Lister (3 hours). Fort Lister is nestled in the gap between the massif and Mchese Mountain.

Admire the impenetrable buttresses of Matambale over your right shoulder as you leave Sombani. Pockets of the endemic Mulanje Cedar also remain in this vicinity.

If you have a vehicle arranged to collect you, a rough dirt road arrives at Fort Lister. If you are reliant on public mini-buses you need to walk down the road a further 2 hours to Phalombe trading centre.

Alternative peaks

There are many options along the route if you are seeking to extend the walk and climb more peaks.

From Chisepo Hut - Chisepo Peak (2,377m, 2 hrs, Difficulty 2 – page 85). Nakodzwe Peak (2,964m, 8 hrs, Difficulty 5 – page 85).

From Thuchila Hut - Nandalanda (2,590m, 4 hrs, Difficulty 3 – page 54), Khuto (2,757m, 6 hrs, Difficulty 4 – page 58) or Dzole (2,715m, 7 hrs, Difficulty 3 – page 58).

From Sombani Hut - Namasile (2,685m, 3 hrs, Difficulty 2 – page 66), Matambale (2,643m, 5 hrs, Difficulty 5 – page 69) or Masasa (2,453m, 6-7 hrs, Difficulty 3 -page 69).



The three sisters – Dzole, Khuto and Nandalanda (left to right) from the sky

Alternative routes

This route can be made into ‘The Grand Circuit’ by starting and ending in either Nessa or Lujeri (Shed 3). Modify the itinerary accordingly:

Day 1: Nessa – Lichenya Hut.

Day 2 – 3: As per ‘The Grand Traverse’

Day 4: Thuchila Hut to Madzeka Hut (6 hours)

Day 5: Madzeka Hut to Nessa.

If your time is limited, the route can be shortened with a quick return to the main road at Thuchila from Thuchila Hut on Day 4.

Altitude Profile

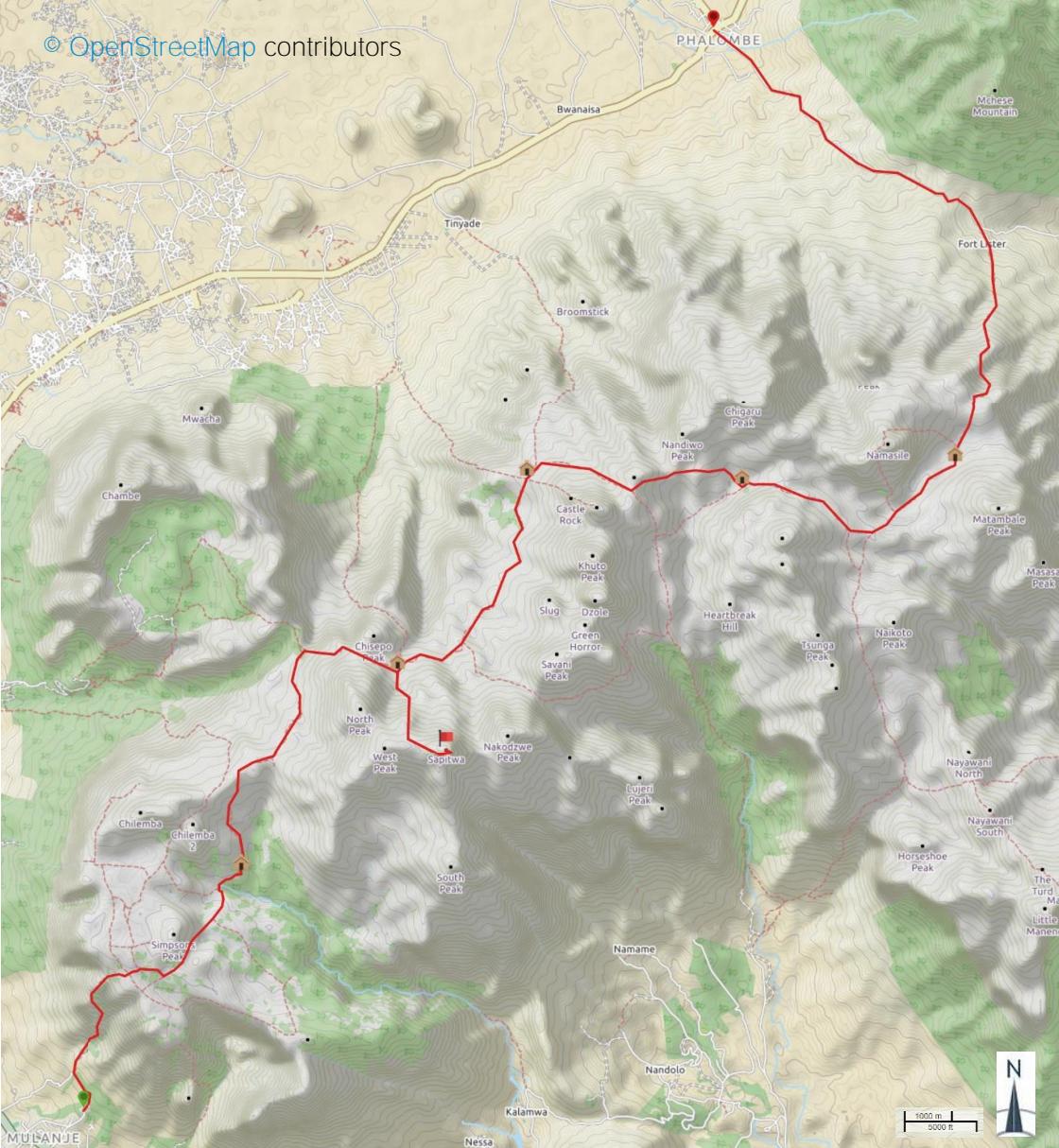


Getting there and away

The route starts from Kara O'Mula hotel in Mulanje boma: turn left off the main road immediately after the market and follow the road steeply up to reach the hotel car park. Arrangements can be made to leave a vehicle here or at other lodges within walking distance in the boma. Guides and porters can be arranged at InfoMulanje or Kara O'Mula.

Phalombe is about one hour's drive from Mulanje town, depending on the road conditions. Public mini-buses and buses travel between the two; seek local advice for schedules. If you arrive in Phalombe late in the day, it may be necessary to find accommodation for the evening before travelling early the next day.





Acknowledgements

Exploring Mount Mulanje has been all the more enjoyable for sharing with good friends, many from the Mountain Club of Malawi. The desire for more people to enjoy the mountain has been a constant source of inspiration whilst writing this guide.

A number of mountain guides have also been excellent companions. Their intimate knowledge of the mountain routes and ability to navigate through dense cloud will never cease to amaze me.

Many thanks to the individuals that have supported the production of this guidebook: Helene Bovy, Carl Bruessow, Mariana Gallo, Frank Johnston, Daniel Kloser, George Margesson and Maggie O'Toole.

Frank Eastwood's original guide has been at hand throughout writing and likewise, the MCM Handbook has been a valuable source.

Photo credits

Drew Corbyn with the exception of:

Likhubula Falls (page 18): David Drew.

A runner on the Chambe Basin (page 44): Nick Vilelle.

Nakodzwe Peak from Sapitwa (page 88): Justin Woods.

Sapitwa summit (page 90): Justin Woods.

Masasa peak (page 107): Mariana Gallo

Mount Mulanje is the highest mountain in South-Central Africa and one of Malawi's most spectacular landscapes. The rocky peaks, high grasslands, deep gorges and powerful rivers transport the visitor into another world.

This Hiking Guide aims to help more hikers enjoy the majesty of Mount Mulanje. It presents 18 hiking routes on the mountain, from short walks around the base to multi-day hikes to the highest points.

The routes take hikers to plateau, peaks, pools and waterfalls.

The book contains useful information to plan a hike and is rich in route details, photos and maps. The guide is supported by an online platform and mobile app.

